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ROB HAVENS '88

# CONTENTS

## FEATURES

### 21

#### HEARTBREAK LEAVING LAS VEGAS

Aggies fall to USC in Bowl Game.  
BY ROB HAVENS '88

### 22

#### COACH MIKE EARLEY Q&A

The head baseball coach previews the new season.

### 26

#### RIVALRY RENEWED, AGGIES HAMMER HORNS

Texas A&M beats tu in SEC opener.  
BY ROB HAVENS '88

### 29

#### TEXAS A&M SPORT CLUBS

AI spotlights Women's Basketball and Climbing Team Clubs.  
BY ROB HAVENS '88

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## IN EVERY ISSUE

Publisher's Note .....	04
Snapshots .....	06
Scoreboard .....	15
The 12th Man .....	30

**ON THE COVER:** The 12th Man goes crazy after the Aggies dramatically beat Oregon at the Super Regional to punch their ticket to Omaha. Photo by Rob Havens '88



# Howdy Ags!

The football team wrapped up the '24 season in a heartbreaking loss to USC (story inside). And at the post-game presser, Elko promised never to watch his defense play that way again. Unsurprisingly, he is already making moves to keep his promise by hiring his former co-defensive coordinator at Duke, Lyle Hemphill, to coach up our defensive backs. According to Tex Ags Billy Luicci, Coach Elko plans to "run and call the defense" next season. This is great news for the 12th Man as the Aggie defense was the strength of the team when Elko was the DC. Jay Bateman will focus on the front seven as the Aggies move forward.

I was super excited to visit with our new head baseball coach Mike Earley for a Q&A. It was my first time talking to him, and I am convinced we got the right guy. In addition to his ability to instruct our hitters and run the offense, which is evident by the results since he has been here, he is a players coach. You can have the most talent in the country, but you gotta have a coach that the players want to play for. The other thing that is so important is you need to have someone who wants to be here and is not looking at this place as a stepping stone to move somewhere else. Coach Earley told me he loves this place and never wants to leave. This is his destination job. We wish him well and are extremely excited about this season. The team is ranked #1 in the preseason poll and the goal is to finish the season in the same spot!

Buzz and the bunch beat tu to start conference play (story inside), and have had two heart-stopping wins over OU and Ole Miss. If they can stay healthy and continue to gel together this team could be dancing for a while in March!

**Gig'em!**

*Rob '88*



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# Aggieland ILLUSTRATED

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## INSTANT IMPACT

6'9 junior transfer Pharrel Payne extends over an Alabama defender for two of his 23 points. The talented center from Cottage Grove, Minnesota has made an immediate impact since arriving in Aggieland. He leads the Aggies in field goal percentage at almost 70% and is third on the team in scoring. He also leads the Aggies in free throws made and blocks. Photo by Rob Havens '88







## DEFENDING THE TITLE

Jeanette Mireles serves in the opening match of the 2025 season. The Aggies brought home the national championship last year and begin this season as the #2 team in the country. Mireles begins her fourth year with the program and has been an integral part of the success we have had since she arrived. She had ten singles wins during conference play last year and earned SEC All-Tournament honors and made the NCAA All-Tournament team for doubles. Photo by Rob Havens '88





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## HE'S NUMBER ONE

Senior transfer guard Zhuric Phelps launches a three from downtown as No. 11 Texas A&M tamed the LSU Tigers 68-57. Wade Taylor IV was sidelined for three games due to an injury, forcing Phelps to help pick up the slack and take on a leadership role on the team. The SMU transfer showed he was willing and able to help the Aggies win. Phelps leads the team in points and steals. Photo by Rob Havers '88







## CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES

Coach Neil Taylor embraces Aicha Coumbaly after the Aggies' upset win over the #11 Kentucky Wildcats. The Cats entered the contest with a 16-1 record and were undefeated in conference play. Coumbaly led the team with 21 points, including 14 in the second half. Trailing by ten in the third quarter the Aggies fought back and scored 19 in the final quarter to win 61-55. Photo by Rob Havens '88



A photograph of George H.W. Bush in a dark blue baseball jacket with the number 33 on the sleeve, holding a brown leather baseball glove. He is smiling and looking to the right. In the background, a crowd of people is visible, some wearing red and white clothing. A circular seal with the number 41 is in the top right corner.

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An advertisement for the Hilton College Station & Conference Center. The main image shows a large, modern hotel building at dusk. A film strip graphic on the left side shows three frames: a parking lot, a swimming pool, and a view of the hotel. The text 'GAMEDAY STARTS Here!' is written in a serif font, with 'Here!' in a script font. At the bottom, it says 'BOOK YOUR STAY TODAY! WWW.HILTONCS.COM'. The Hilton logo and 'COLLEGE STATION & CONFERENCE CENTER' are in the bottom right corner.

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## WOMEN'S TENNIS

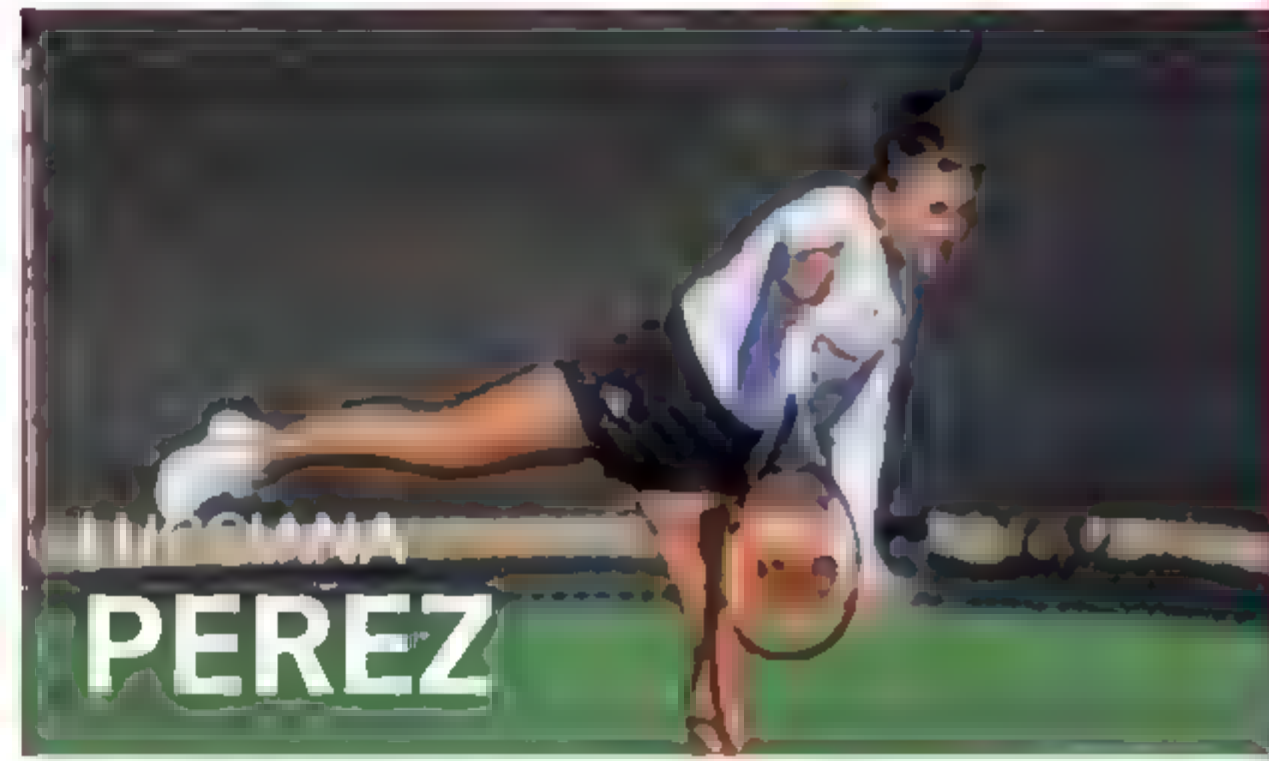
The defending national champions picked up this season right where they left off last year by winning their first three matches and taking the ITA Kickoff Weekend Championship. Coach Weaver returns almost all of the team that brought home the natty last year, including ITA National Player of the Year winner Mary Stoiana.



MIA  
**KUPRES**

## MEN'S TENNIS

The No. 13 Aggies posted a big win early in the season as they took care of No. 21 UCLA, 4-3, on the opening day of ITA Kickoff Weekend. With the Aggies tied 3-3, senior JC Roddick clinched the match with a thrilling three-set victory over #50 Rudy Quan.



MARY STOIANA  
**PEREZ**



NITISH  
**PATIL**



THEO  
**PAPAMALAMIS**

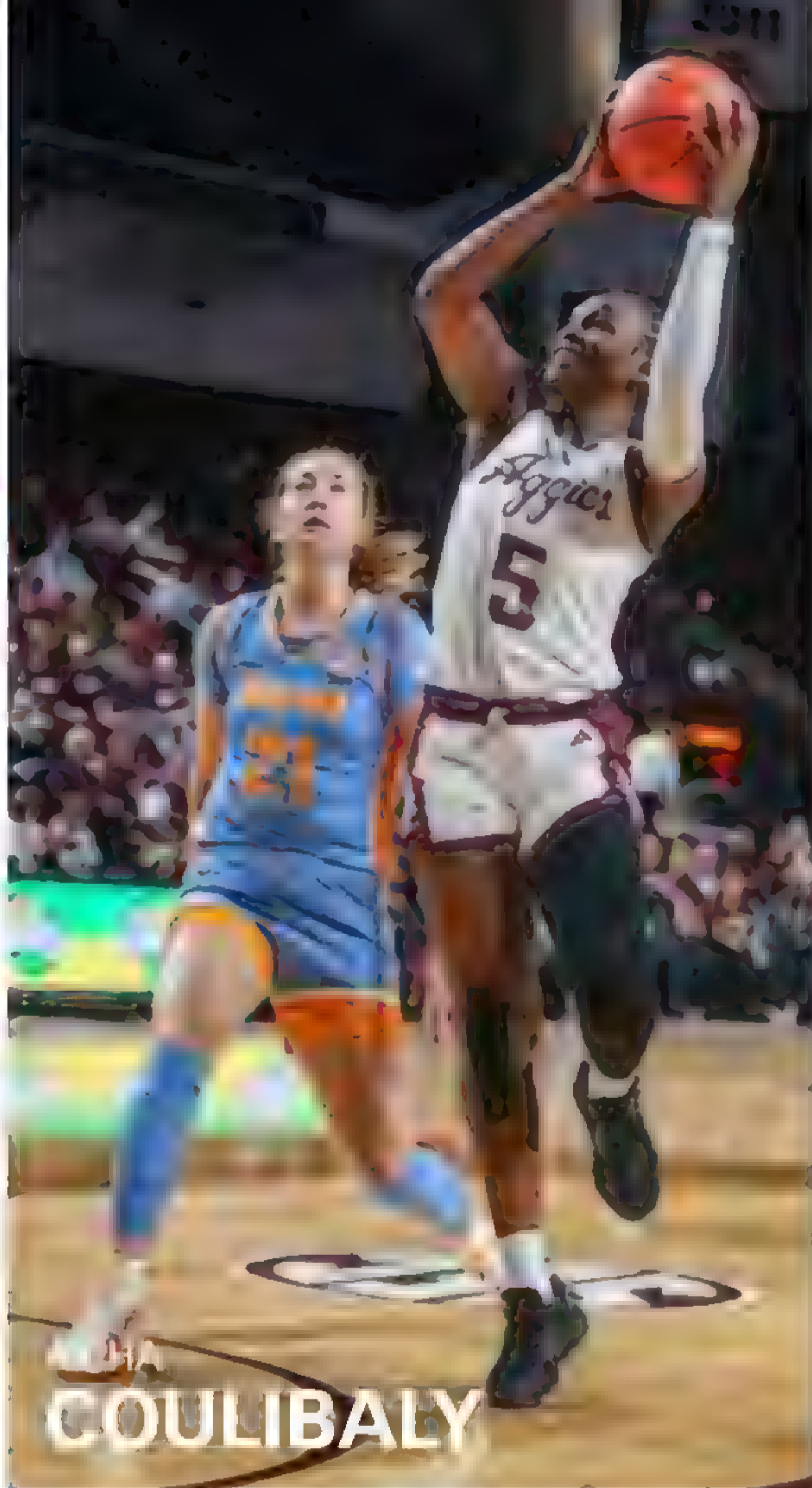


GIULIO  
**PEREGO**





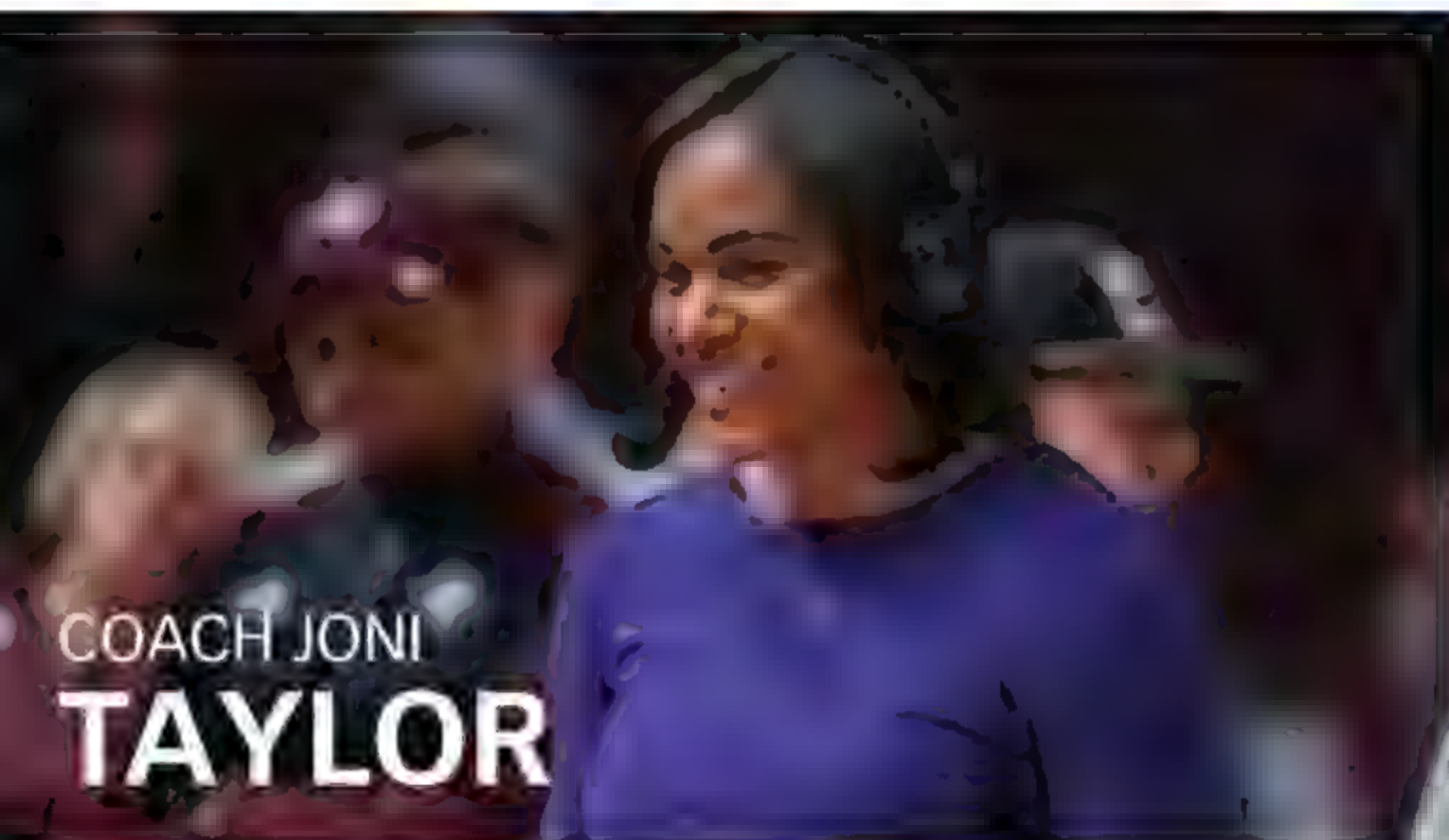
JANAE  
**KENT**



MALIA  
**COULIBALY**



TALIYAH  
**PARKER**



COACH JONI  
**TAYLOR**

**WOMEN'S BASKETBALL**

Through the first 18 games the Aggies are 10-8 with impressive wins over two ranked teams. The Aggies overcame a 16-point deficit to beat the #25 Rebels in Oxford 60-58. On January 23rd the team shocked the college basketball world by upsetting #11 Kentucky 61-55. The Wildcats entered the contest 16-1 and were undefeated in conference play. Down ten in the third, the Aggies rallied back to win 61-55.



ERICA  
**MOON**

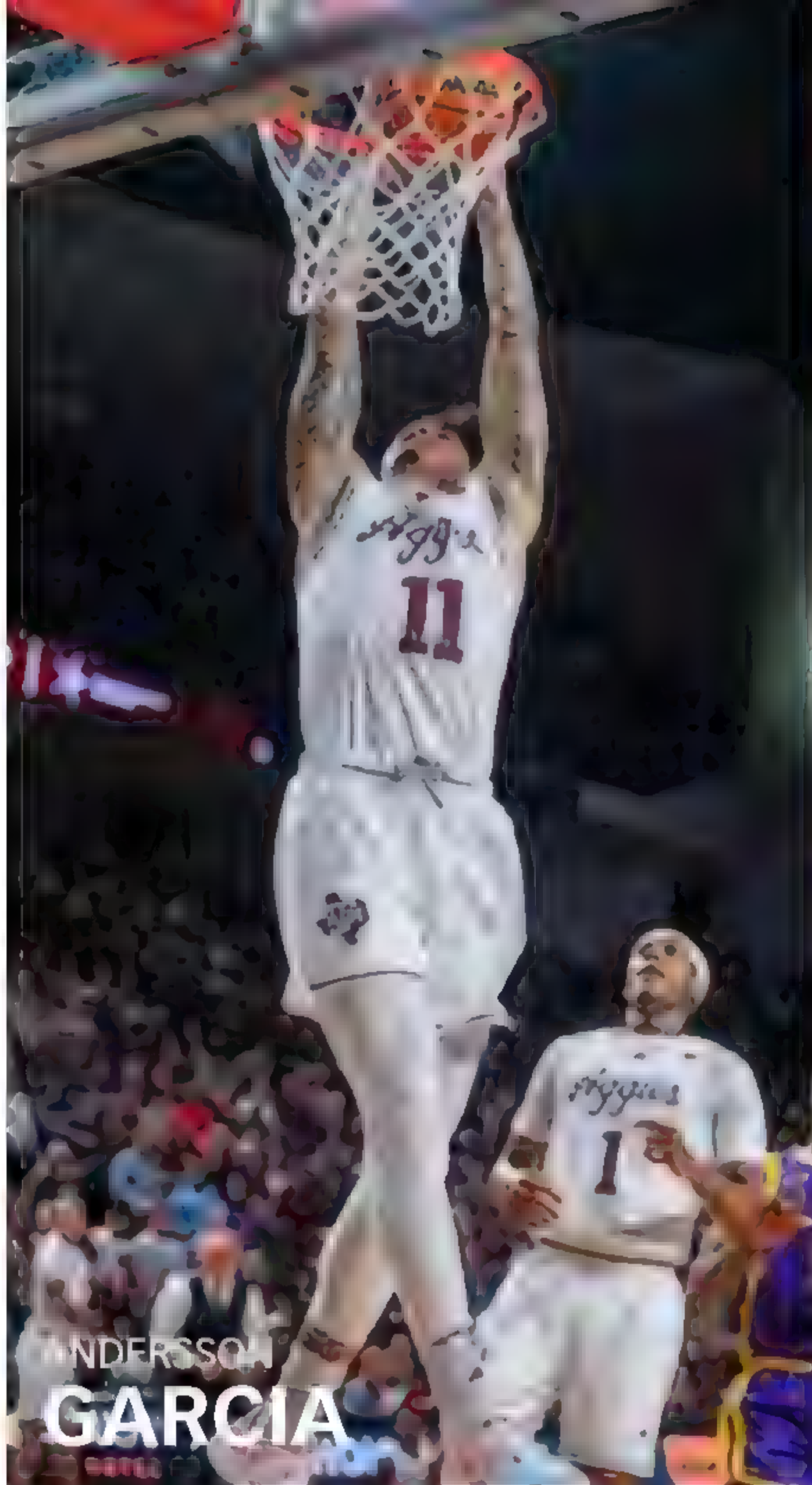


LAUREN  
**WARE**

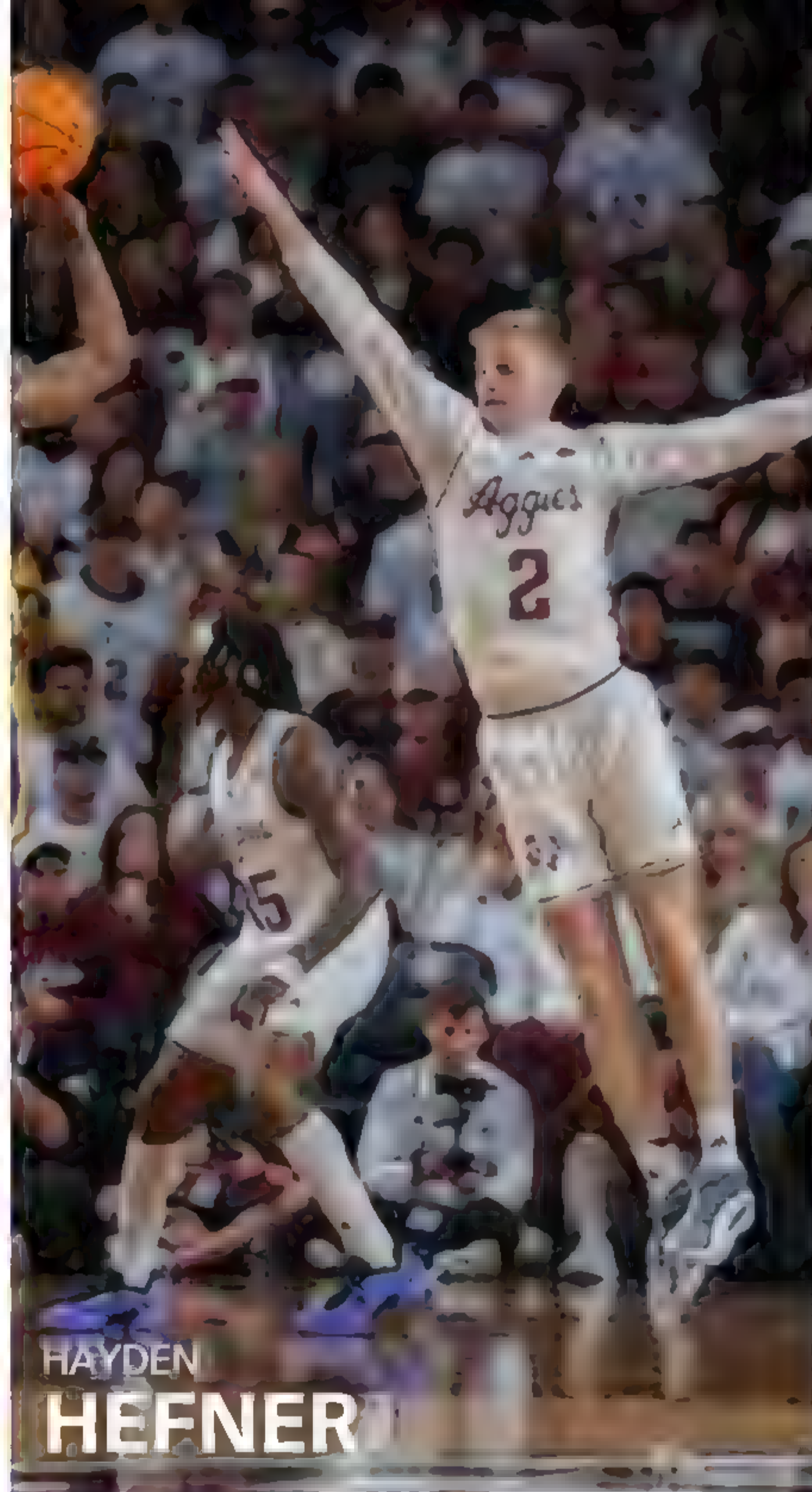


AHARA  
**JONES**

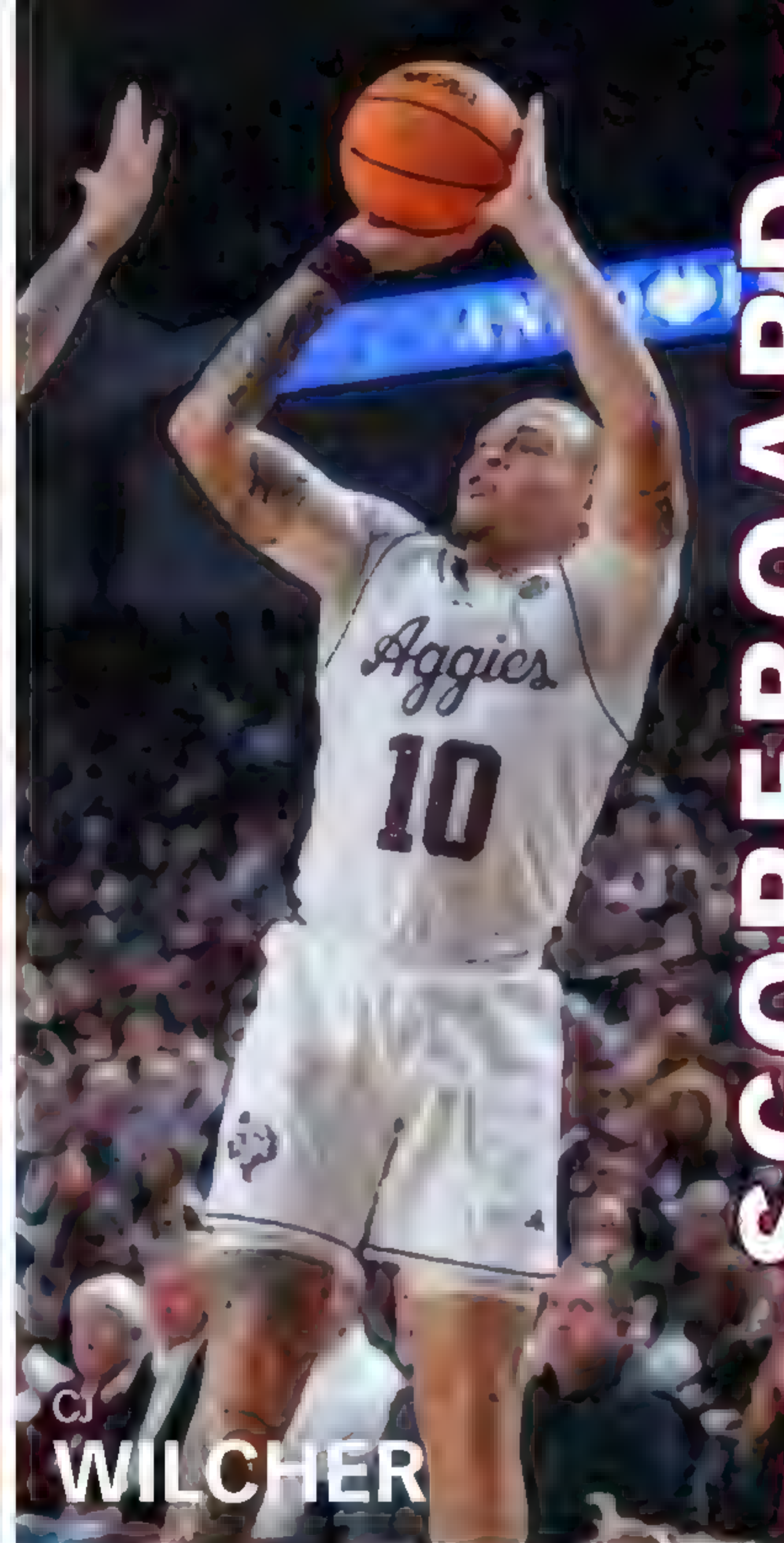




JAMAR  
**ANDERSSON  
GARCIA**



HAYDEN  
**HEFNER**



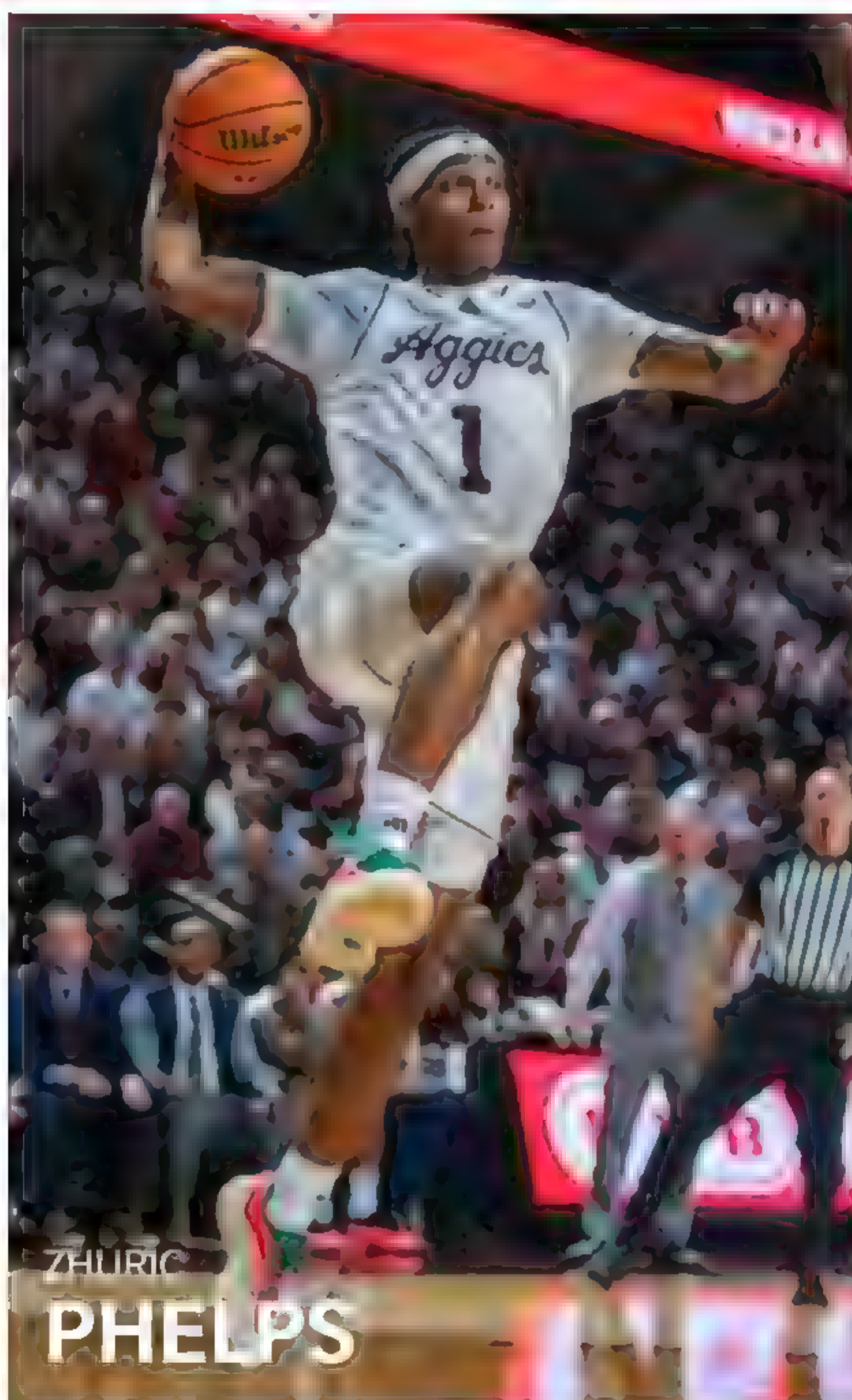
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## MEN'S BASKETBALL

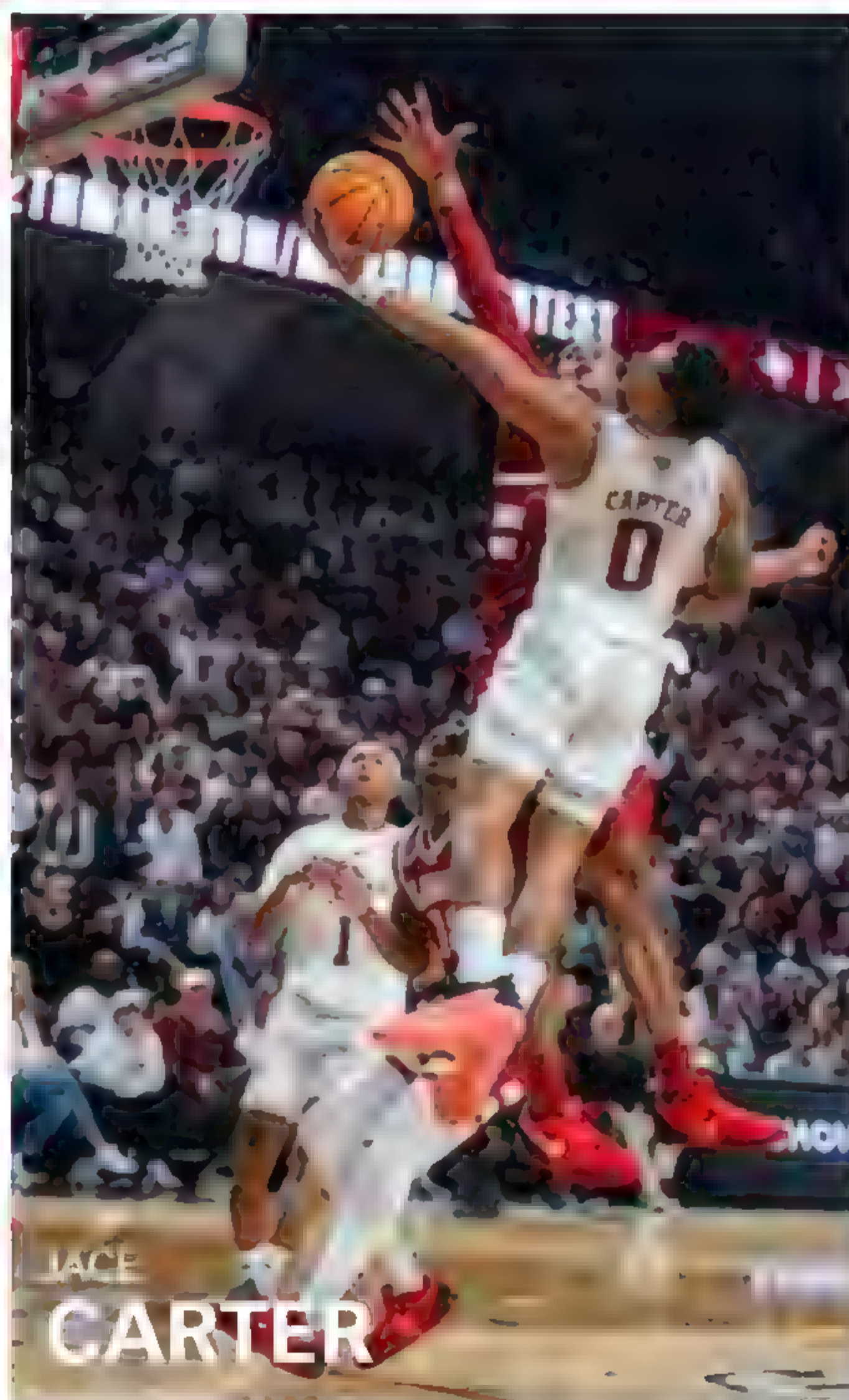
After one of the toughest non-conference schedules in the country, the Aggies were 11-2. With eleven games to play the Aggies are 4-3 in the SEC. The Aggies beat the Horns by 20 at Reed Arena and then had amazing comeback wins over the Sooners in Norman (80-78) and Ole Miss in Oxford (63-62). Zurich Phelps hit a late 3-pointer against Oklahoma to clinch the win and Manny Obaseki did the same at Ole Miss, as the Aggies showed a never-say-die mentality.



WADE  
**TAYLOR IV**



ZHURIC  
**PHELPS**



JACE  
**CARTER**



PHAREE  
**PAYNE**





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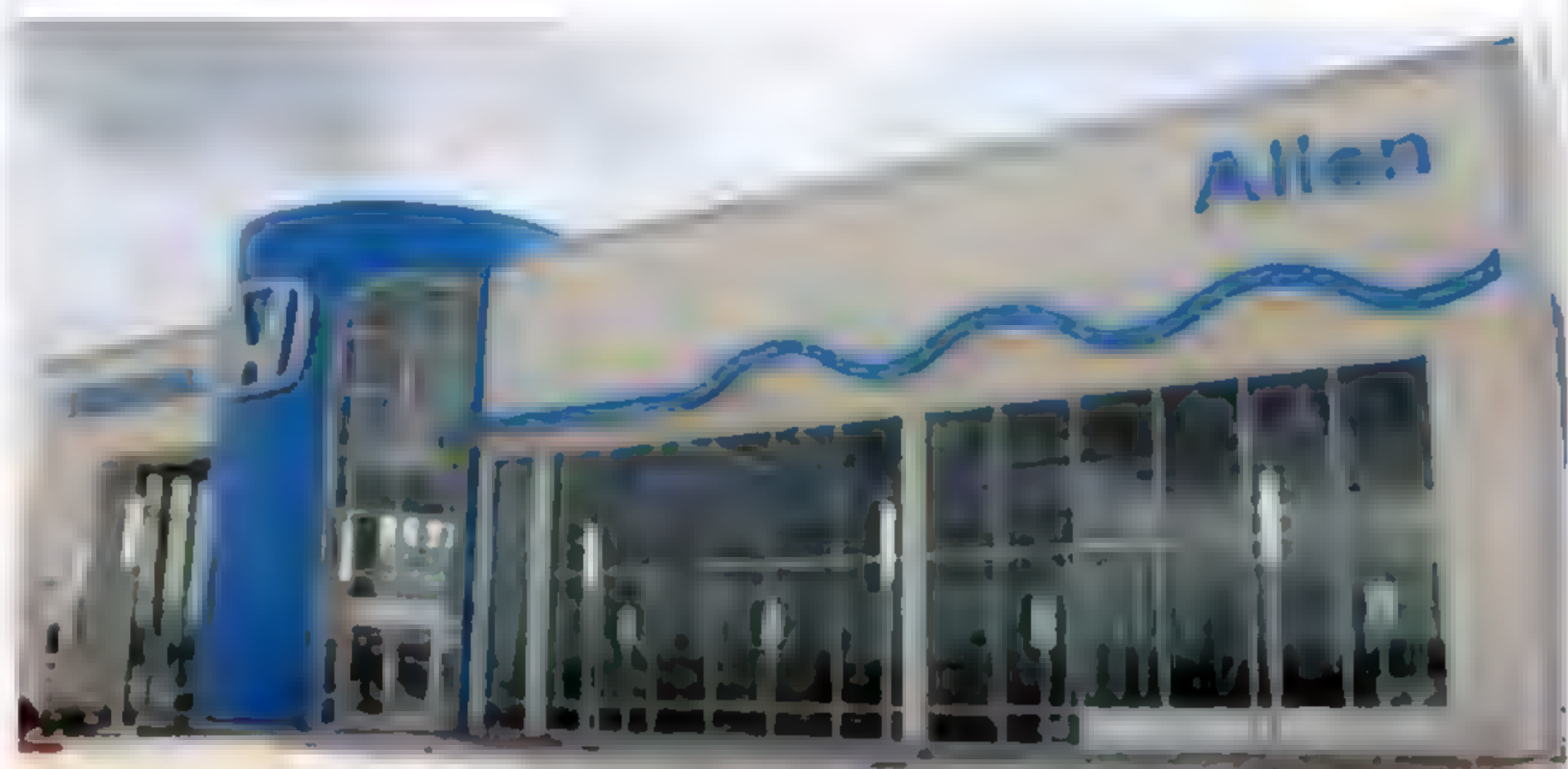
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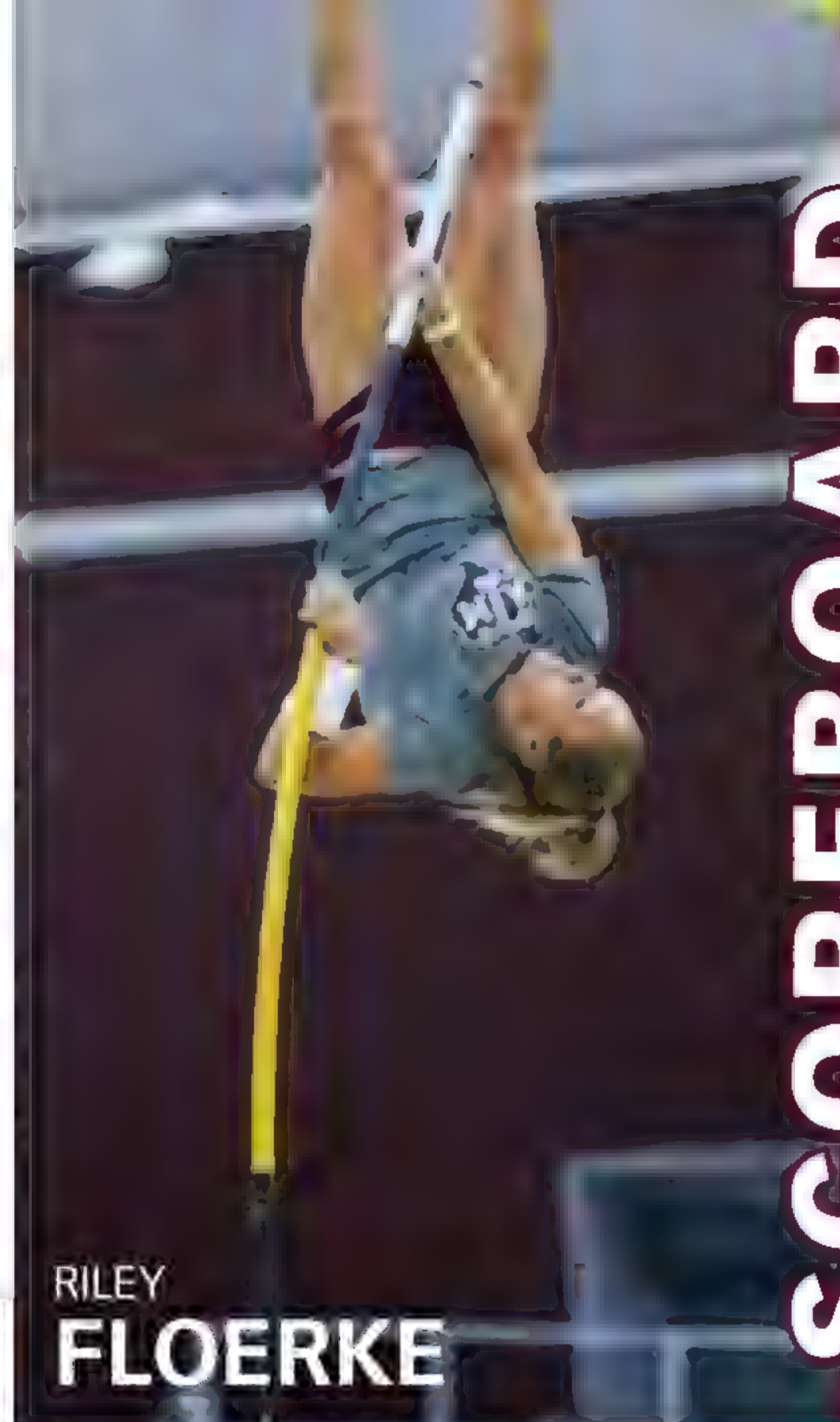




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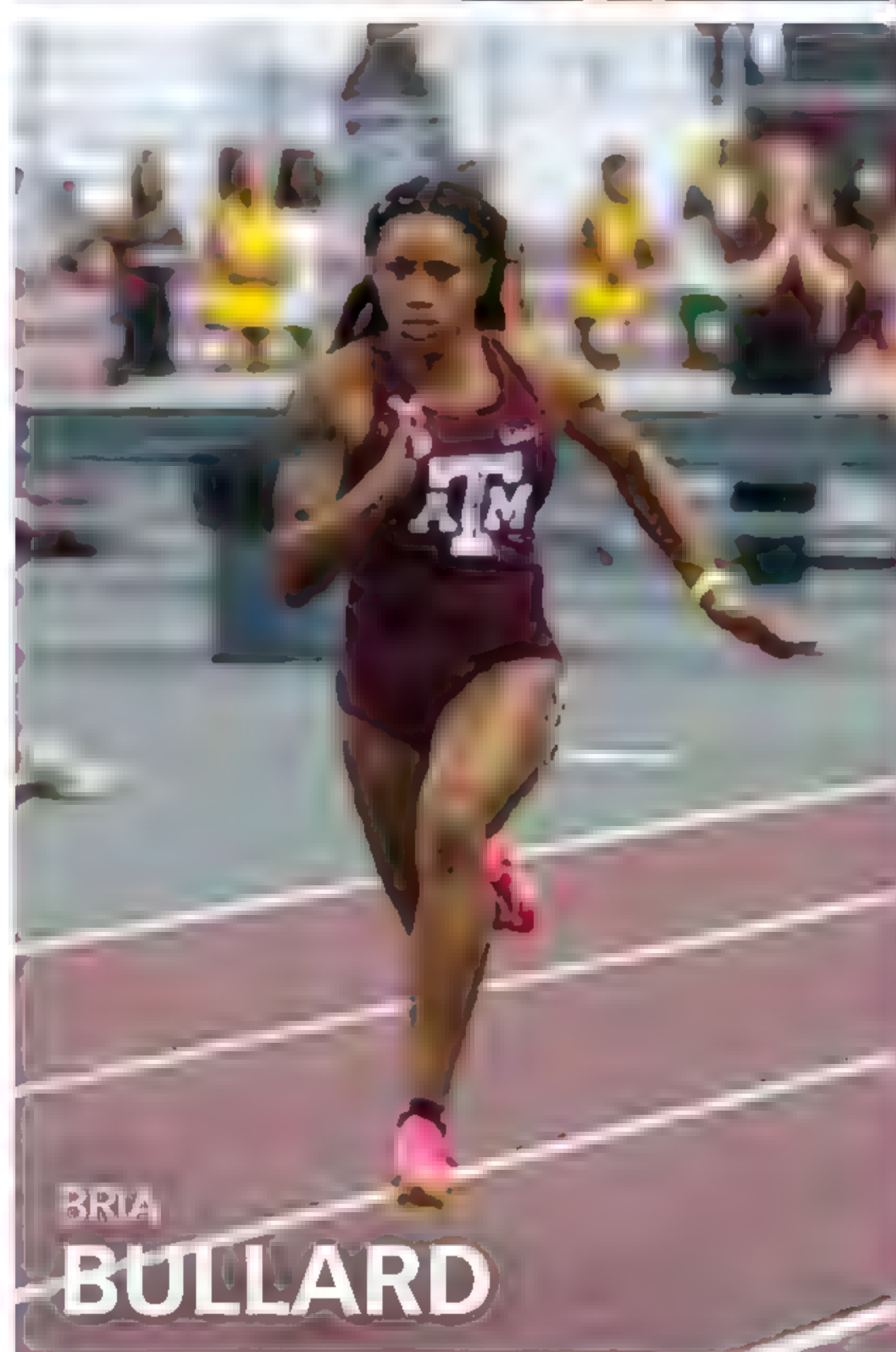
# SCOREBOARD

## TRACK & FIELD

The Aggies unveiled a memorial for Aggie Hall of Fame member Deon Lendore at the McFerrin-12 Degree Invitational. Lendore's mom, Chrispina Edmund, was on hand as Coach Pat Henry and the entire Track & Field Team joined at the north end of the stadium to unveil the beautiful statue. The Aggies would go on to earn 12 event wins at the meet. Texas A&M athletes logged nine top-12 marks in Aggie history and recorded 16 personal bests on the day.



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**EDMUND**  
(M. LENDORE)



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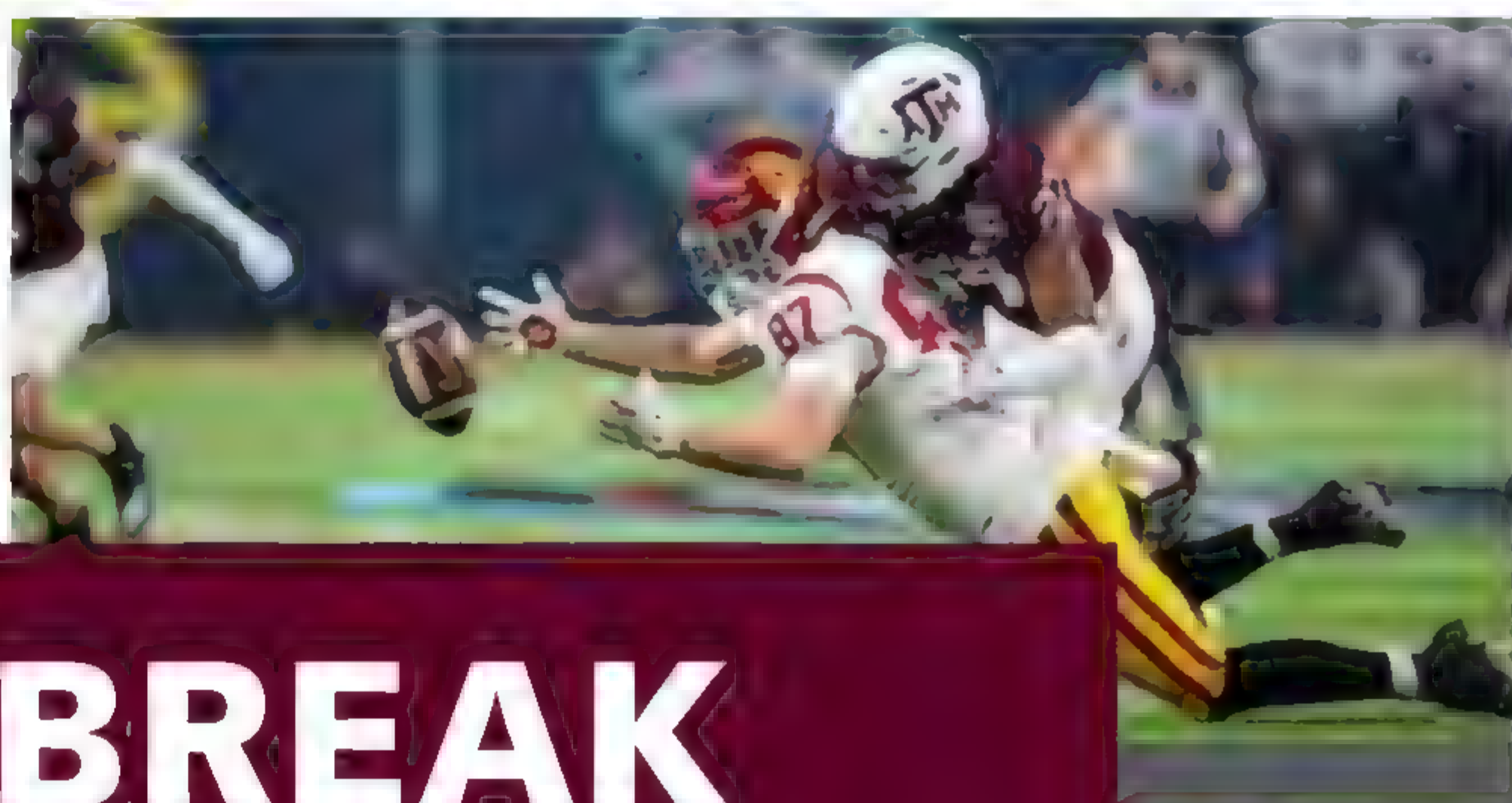
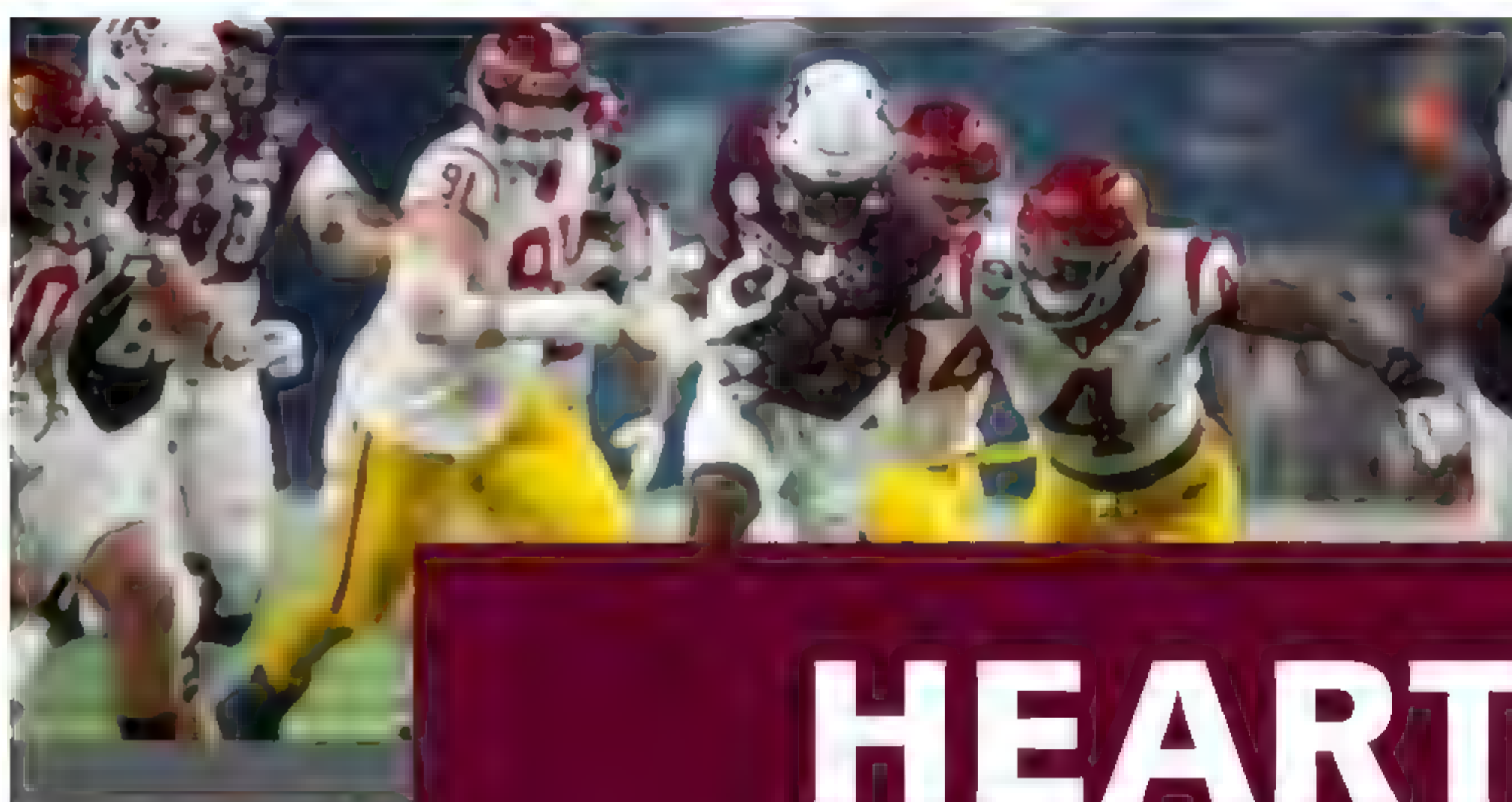
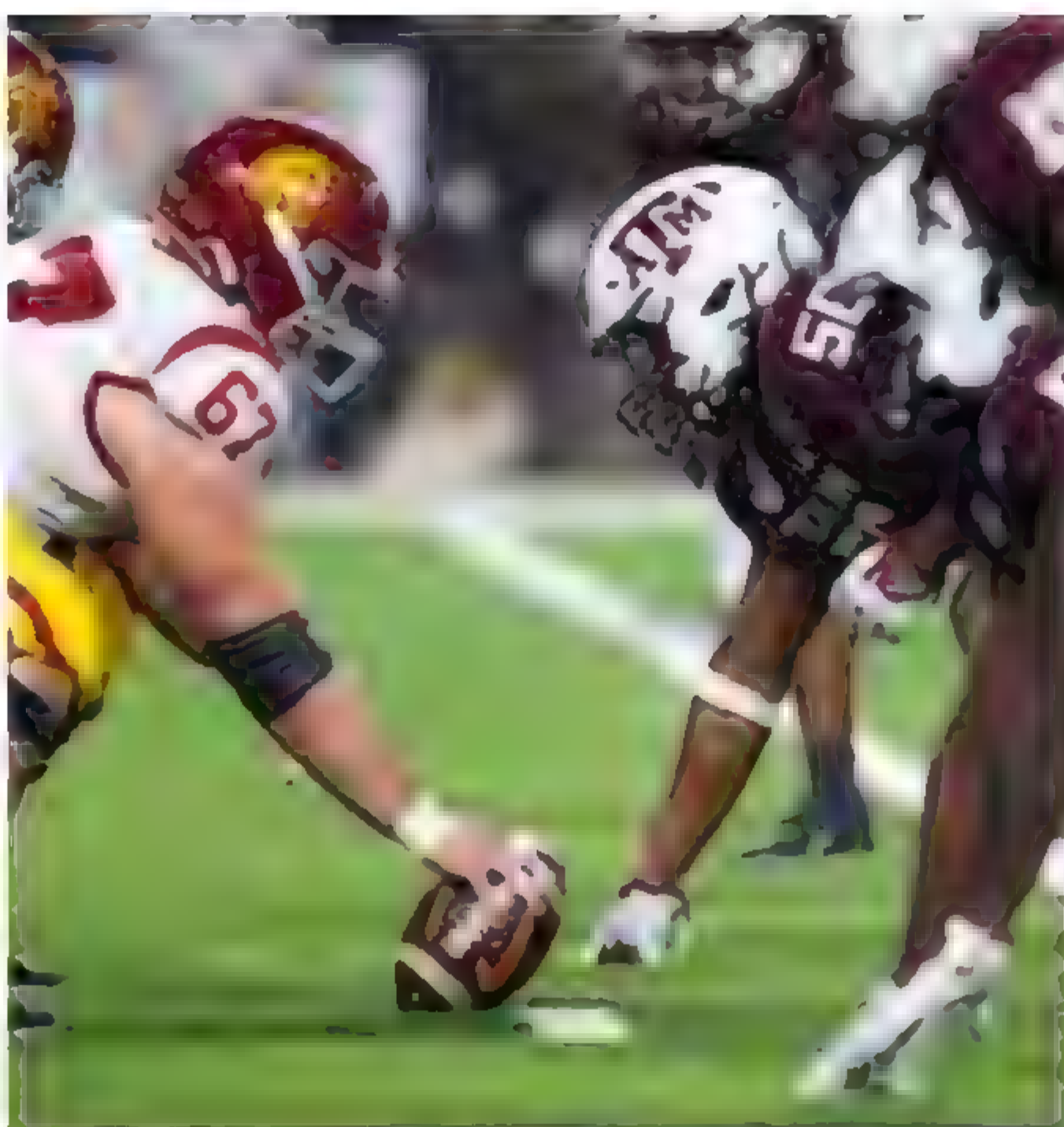
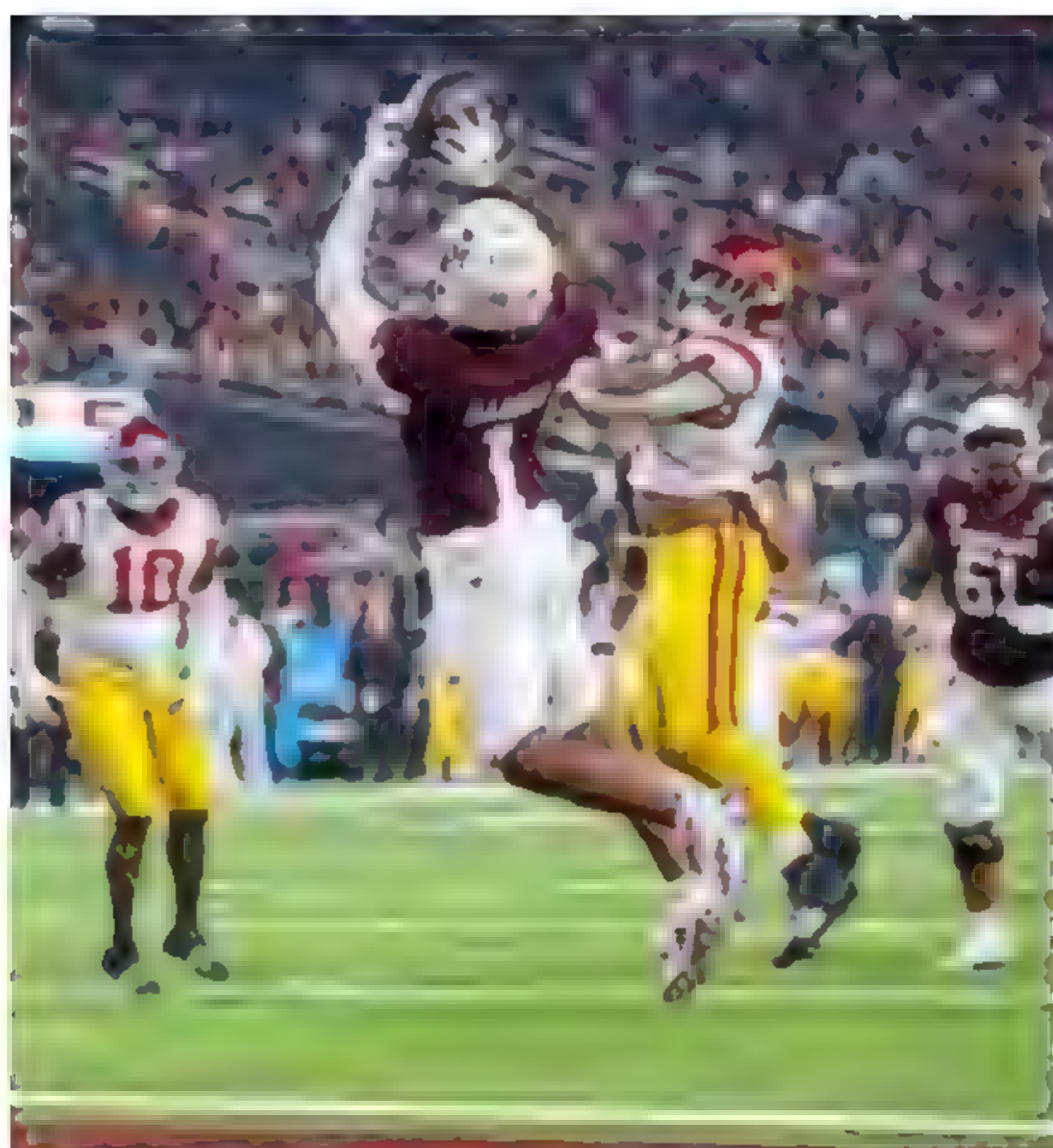
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# HEARTBREAK

## LEAVING LAS VEGAS

BY ROB HAVENS '88

The football team wrapped up their season in Vegas, and like most of us who have ventured to "The Gambling Capital of the World," it didn't end well. These games have become meaningless in this new era of Bowl games outside the CFP. But after the tough last four weeks of the season, the Las Vegas Bowl gave the Aggies a chance to finish the season on a high note.

The Aggies faced USC for the first time in half a century, and it was a great matchup. The defenses dominated the first half and after thirty minutes the teams were deadlocked at seven points apiece. The Maroon & White came out of the locker room at halftime and scored 17 unanswered points. Marcel Reed showed off his arm, completing six passes in the first drive of the second half. The 76-yard drive culminated in a five-yard touchdown completion for Noah Thomas, who gave the Aggies the lead.

On their next drive, the Ags would drive to the nine-yard line before settling for a 27-yard Randy Bond field goal to extend the lead to 17-7. Just three plays later Cashius Howell would give the Aggies the ball back after he intercepted Jayden Maiava's pass and returned it to the Trojan nine-yard line, which led to a Jabre Barber five-yard touchdown reception.

With 5:10 remaining in the third quarter, and a 24-7 lead, Texas A&M seemed destined to end the season on a winning note. But the Trojans stormed back and scored 21 unanswered points to take a 28-24 lead with 4:30 left in the game.

The Aggies responded, needing just seven plays to go 75 yards, as Reed tore up the Trojan defense with his arm and his legs. Marcel put the Ags back on top with a 19-yard run with 1:49 left in the game.

Unfortunately, the defense could not get a stop and with eight seconds left in the game, Maiava found Kyle Ford in the endzone for a seven-yard touchdown, giving the Trojans the win and breaking Aggie hearts all over the nation.

In a somber press conference after the game, Coach Elko said, "The story of the game is the story of our season. We can't cover the forward pass well enough to be a good football team." He promised he would never watch the defense play that way ever again. Since becoming head coach, Elko has changed the direction of the program. "We are now where we need to be from a cultural standpoint," Elko said. "Now, we have to become a good football program. That's the next step we have to take." ■



# Q&A

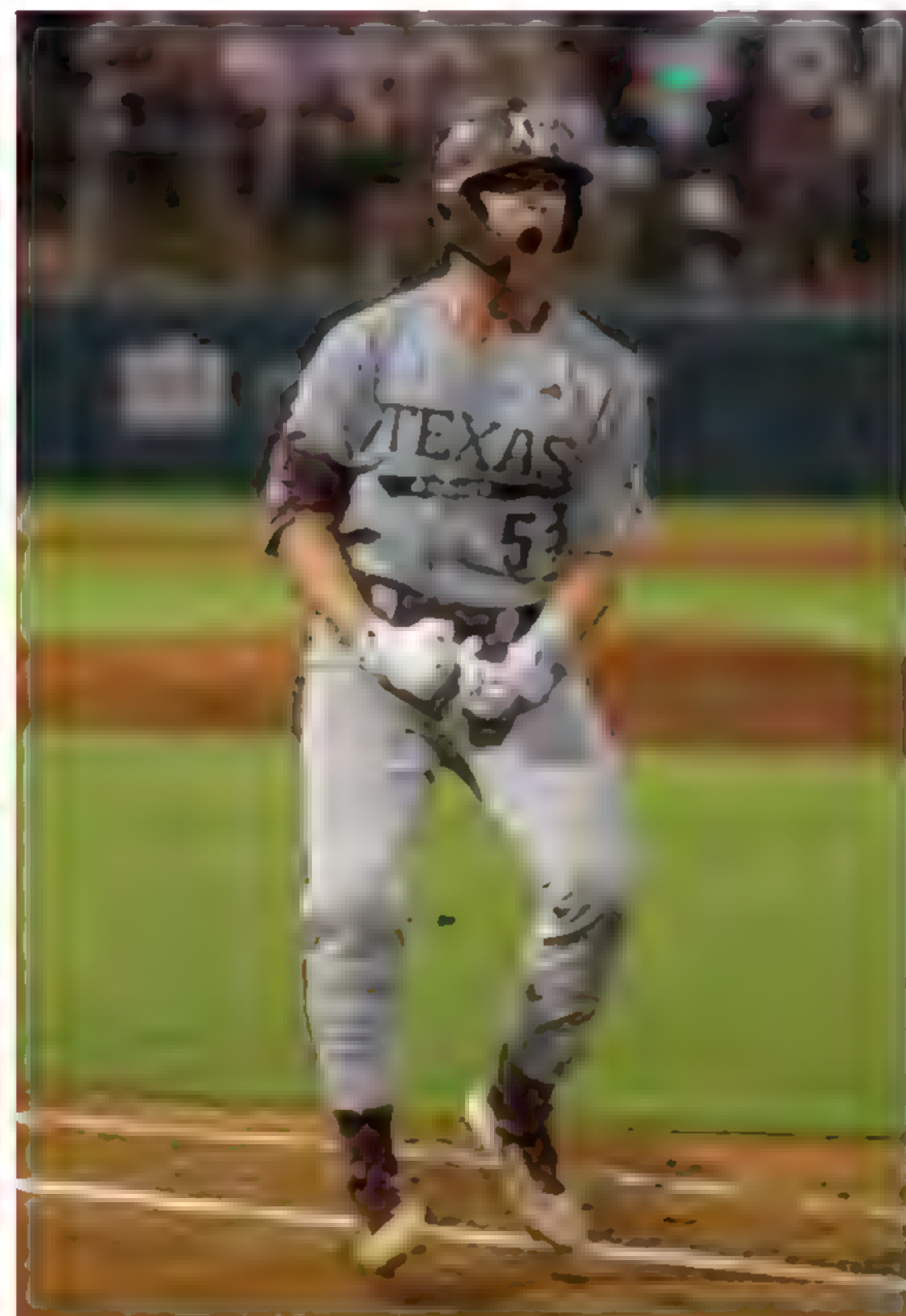
## COACH MIKE EARLEY

### HOW HAS IT BEEN SO FAR?

It's been good! Obviously, new challenges and major personal life changes for me. It's been awesome to be in a place that I'm comfortable around, with an awesome administration, coaching staff, and players. It's been challenging, but way more fulfilling and fun than anything stressful, that's for sure.

### TELL ME ABOUT THE CHEMISTRY WITH THE NEW COACHING STAFF.

It's been good. It's awesome that I had relationships with all of the staff and they happened to check the box of guys I thought were best for the job - and the sidenote was I already knew 'em. I didn't look at my staff like I wanted to find guys I knew and then hope they are good at the job. Let's find guys that are good at the job and the little bonus part was I already had that relationship, so the chemistry is really good. Some of these guys I was thinking about - I went through the COVID season with two of these guys, so talk about a challenging time right? You became close with people and everyone kind of remembers that. Going through that with them in the moment made us closer, and then we stayed in touch and obviously Coach Fox has been with me for the last three years, and he's a guy. I love him like a brother. Just great chemistry as a staff and with Jason Hutchins still here, Jace Hutchins, Jack Mahala, and bringing Jeremy McMillan back from LSU, I feel like I have the best team in the business and they definitely pick up all my shortcomings.



ROB HAVENS '88 / RUSSELL JAMES





## WHAT HAS BEEN THE TOUGHEST PART OF BEING THE HEAD COACH?

It's just time management. Make sure the day is planned out. For me I have three young kids and a wife, so time management and doing things when I'm supposed to do them, setting up my daily schedule and setting up the practice schedule - It's the most challenging, but it's not that difficult. You do it and get it done and you stick to it. Which, obviously, I'm not a robot, so at times you gotta make audibles. It's really about the ebbs and flows of the days and going with them and being super organized and prepared for each individual day, because no matter what you got going on in your life as a head coach, you show up every day, and players expect you to make them better, period. I can never lose sight of that. It's just a lot more work, but I don't want to call it a challenge, it's more of a privilege.

## AS YOU CAN TELL BY THE ATTENDANCE IN THE TWO FALL SCRIMMAGES, FANS ARE SUPER EXCITED ABOUT AGGIE BASEBALL. AS PLAYERS RETURNED FROM THE PORTAL AND DECIDED TO STAY, TELL ME YOUR THOUGHTS AS THAT WHOLE PROCESS WORKED OUT.

Obviously, it was an awesome feeling. I think all of us share a love for Texas A&M and share a love for working together. We feel like collectively we have some unfinished business, right? Get everyone back together. This is the same program but in a lot of ways, it's different now. It's a different approach around some of the same structure and culture. It's been really good. It's felt really good. You know, some of these guys, it just felt unfinished. I just felt like I was supposed to coach Jace LaViolette for three years. Like I was supposed to coach Gavin Grahovac for another two and Caden Sorrell and Hayden Schott. That's just what my mindset has been for the last few years. I didn't see it any other way. Just being able to get back to that, for me personally, and guys like Brad Rudis and Justin Lamkin, it was just never in my mind that I wouldn't be with them this year, so for a moment I thought I wouldn't be, but a moment later I am. It's just really cool and I appreciate those guys a ton.

## IT WILL BE A COUPLE OF MONTHS BEFORE YOU PLAY YOUR FIRST GAME BUT WE'D LOVE TO SHARE WITH OUR READERS WHAT THE FIELD AND LINEUP WOULD LOOK LIKE. CAN YOU SHARE WITH ME WHO YOU WOULD PENCIL IN AT THIS MOMENT?

There are obviously a ton of things that could happen or change, but just going around the diamond starting at the catcher position, I could not tell you today whether it would be Jacob Galloway or Bear Harrison. They are both right there. One hits left-handed and one hits right-handed, and it might depend on a match-up, so those guys are going to battle all year and in the spring. Jamal George is a little bit behind them on the catching front, but I wouldn't be shocked - I could see him playing back



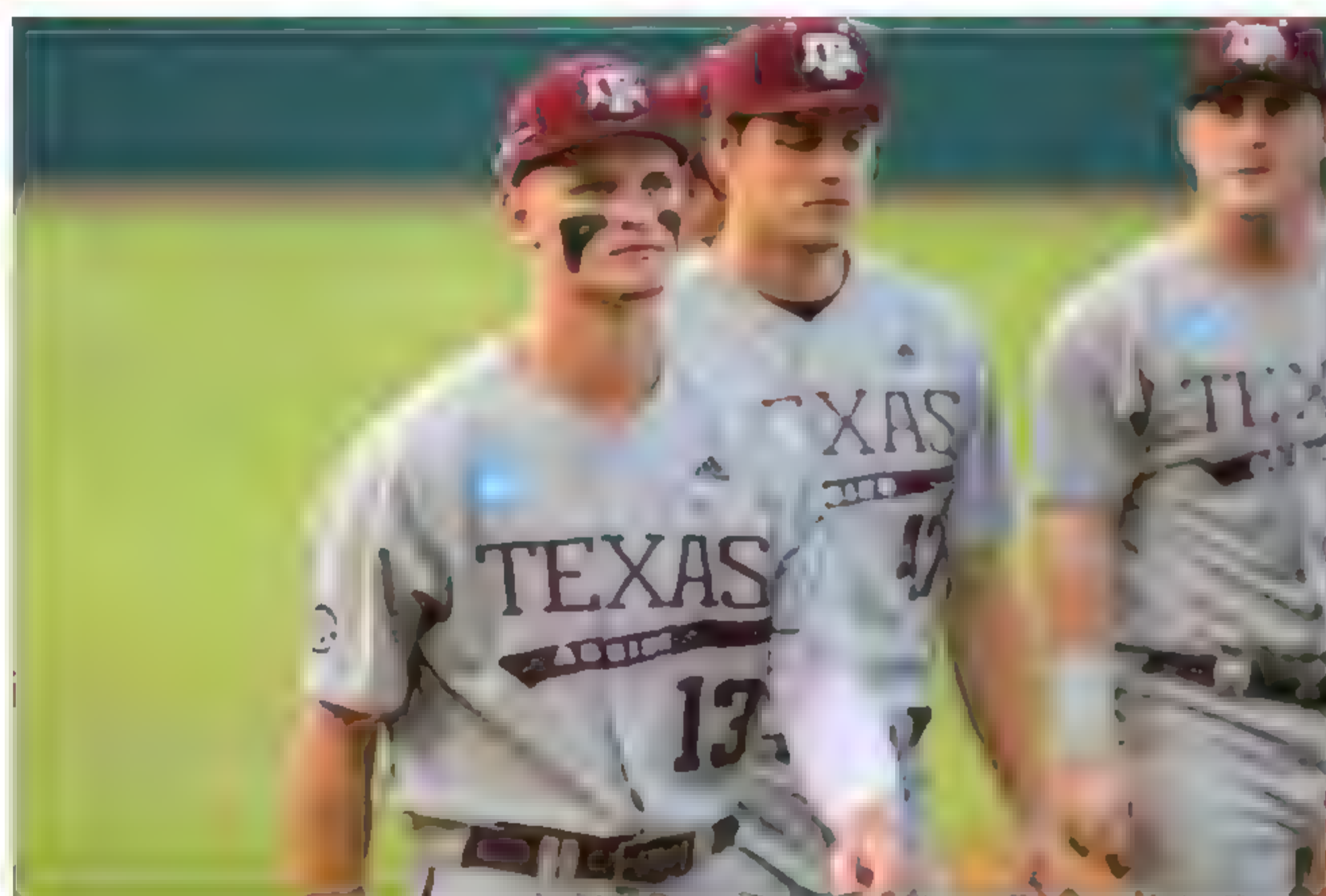
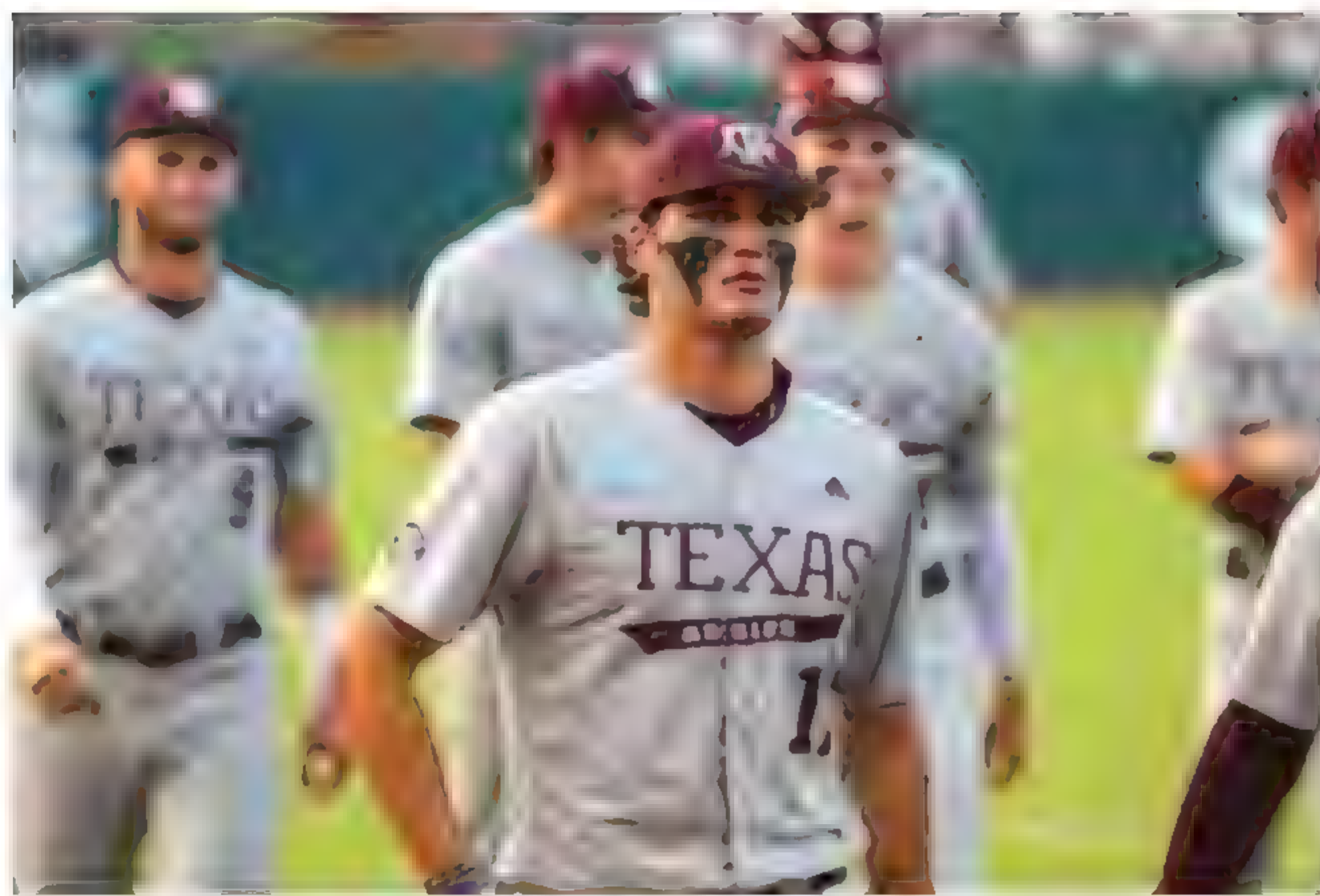
there a good amount. Third base and second base will be a combination of Gavin Grohovac and Wyatt Henseler. Right now, I think if we were to play today I'd play Gavin at third and Wyatt at second. Kaeden Kent would be our shortstop if we played today. I plan on him being our everyday shortstop. Sawyer Farr, a freshman who is super capable of playing short or second, you know, he's right there and gives us some depth. First base is the same as catcher. Matt Bergevin and Blake Binderup - if we played today I couldn't tell you who I'd play. Both of them right there will compete. Left field would be Gavin Kash, center would be Jace LaViolette, right would be Caden Sorrell and Terrence Kiel II would be in that Travis Chestnut defense replace in the outfield pinch run type of role. From a pitching standpoint, I'd be crazy to not say Prager on Friday, Lamkin on Saturday, Sunday could be Myles Patton, Brad Rudis, Kaiden Wilson or Weston Moss. I think we have some pieces on that third day. And kind of filling out the bullpen, we got a lot of different guys and are excited about Jackson Brasseux. He's gonna be a guy to look out for, and Ty Baker, two guys that didn't pitch last season that are redshirt freshmen are guys that I think have a chance to make an impact. Having Josh Stewart and his stability in the bullpen, he could be a middle relief guy or he could be a closer type. I'm probably leaving some people out but I kind of like where we are on both sides of the ball.

#### **WHAT WILL YOUR COACHING STYLE BE AS YOU ATTACK THE SCHEDULE?**

It's going to be how it has always been. I've always, in my mind, carried myself as not the head coach but a leader of these guys. I believe in being prepared and honestly taking it a day at a time. So my approach and our whole focus, while I know the SEC schedule is tough, but that's just what you expect in the SEC, my approach and our focus is on Elon on February 14th. Once we get to that point. You can't really look too far ahead. You're gonna get challenged in the league and you're gonna think you're really good and then you're gonna get smacked in the mouth. You know everyone has a plan until that happens, so then you gotta stick with what you do. Every day, approach going to the field and getting better. Playing the game the right way, respecting your opponent but also having confidence in yourself and your ability no matter what happens. My approach is super positive but also super honest. I'm not afraid to take control of the moment in private with my players and kind of let them know where we're at. It's just kind of the culture that we have going right here.

#### **HOW DID RECRUITING AND THE PORTAL GO FOR YOU? WERE YOU HAPPY WITH THE ADDITIONS THAT YOU MADE?**

Yeah, I mean from the portal standpoint, this off-season I think I saw we got ranked as the second-place portal class - whatever that means. I love the guys we brought in and the guys we were able to retain, I think. You know, when you bring in guys from the portal you want to bring







in guys that hopefully make an immediate impact on your team, and I think every guy we brought in has a chance to do that. I'm super happy about it. From a recruiting class standpoint, I believe we just signed the No. 5 class in 2025. With the previous coach, that class was the No. 8 class, and then it dropped down to the thirties because a couple of guys left. Caleb Longley, our recruiting coordinator, was the one who put together the #2 class at Texas and the #3 the year before. He was able to get our '25 class back up to #5. So, he's done a really really good job. I feel good about it. Baseball recruiting rankings are not the same as other sports to be honest with you. Sometimes you just don't know in baseball. Competition is so different among different high schools. You know, Kaeden Kent in high school was the 18th-ranked shortstop in Texas. I think everyone in the country would think that is probably wrong. Considering what he is and who he is going to be. We think we got the right guys and it's ranked pretty good, which I guess is cool for the fans and people's perceptions. But I believe in the type of guys and the players that we are bringing in.

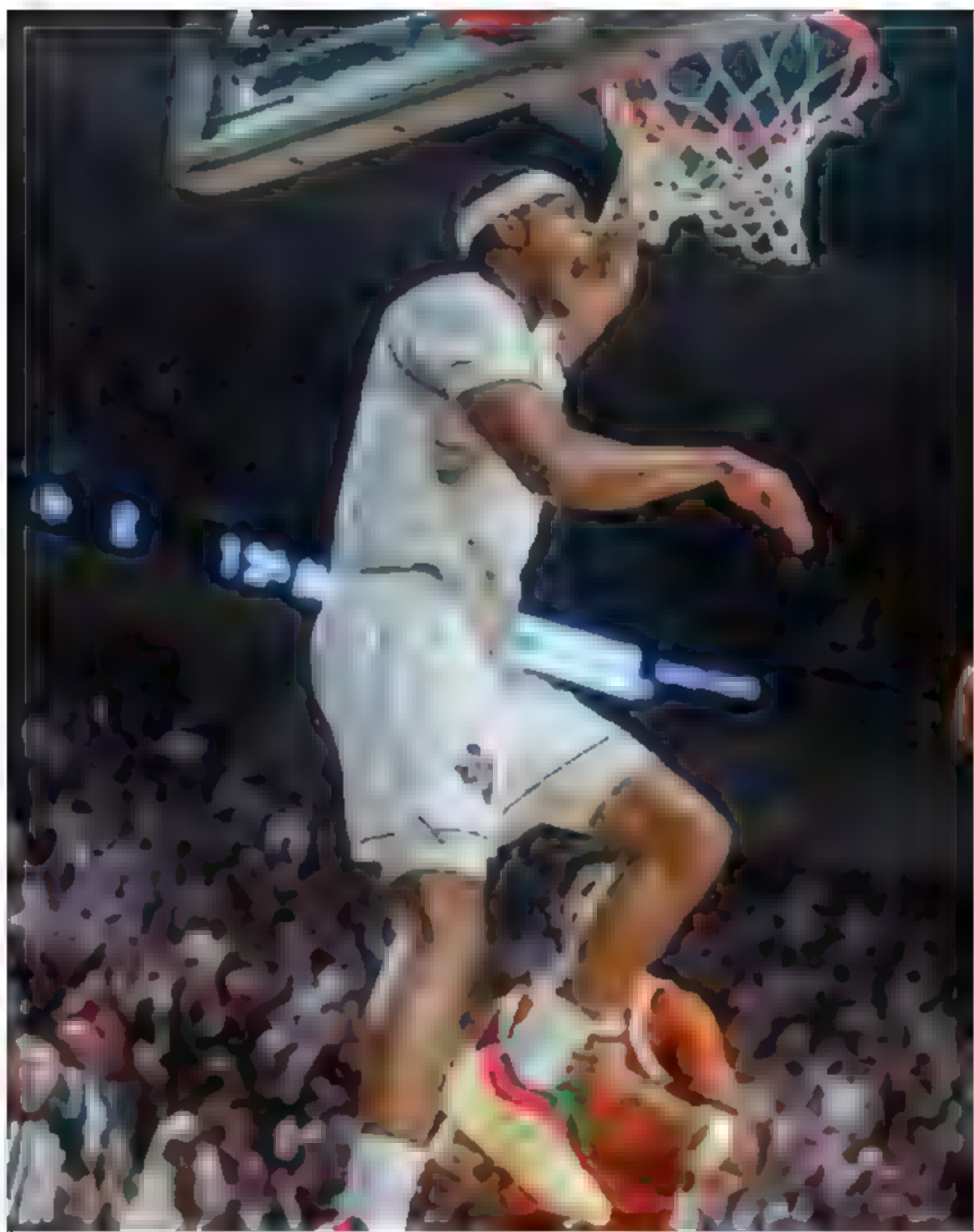
### **HOW WAS THE FAMILY ABOUT STAYING HERE IN COLLEGE STATION?**

Oh man, (laughs) they were quite the whirlwind of conversations with my wife and my kids. Just a couple of days period they were kind of looking for, you know, the camera to come out and say I was punking them. (Laughs) It was great man, I love this community. I love being here and I'm out in the community like I always have been. You see me at the kid's softball games, baseball games, at the grocery store, whatever. I just love it here and love being around, so it was awesome for all of us. Sometimes in life, you gotta deal with change and be able to move and get up, but we just - not from here. This is a place we never want to leave. So it was super cool for them. Kids got to stay on all of their same sports teams and same schools and it was awesome. I just smile thinking about that moment, because in the end my life isn't about me anymore. It's about my family and the players that I'm here to make better. So, I was just happy for all of them.

### **HAVE CHANGES IN SCHOLARSHIPS AFFECTED THE WAY YOU HAVE TO RECRUIT?**

It's affected it a little. We want to bring in smaller recruiting classes. We want our '26 recruiting class to be smaller. We want quality guys and not a ton. We anticipate the roster to change to 34. We have to be a little creative. We are recruiting more two-way guys. We want guys that can do both. I don't want pitchers, I don't want infielders, I don't want outfielders, I want baseball players. As many baseball players as we can put on the roster and that's what we're doing, and we've already signed a couple of good ones. ■

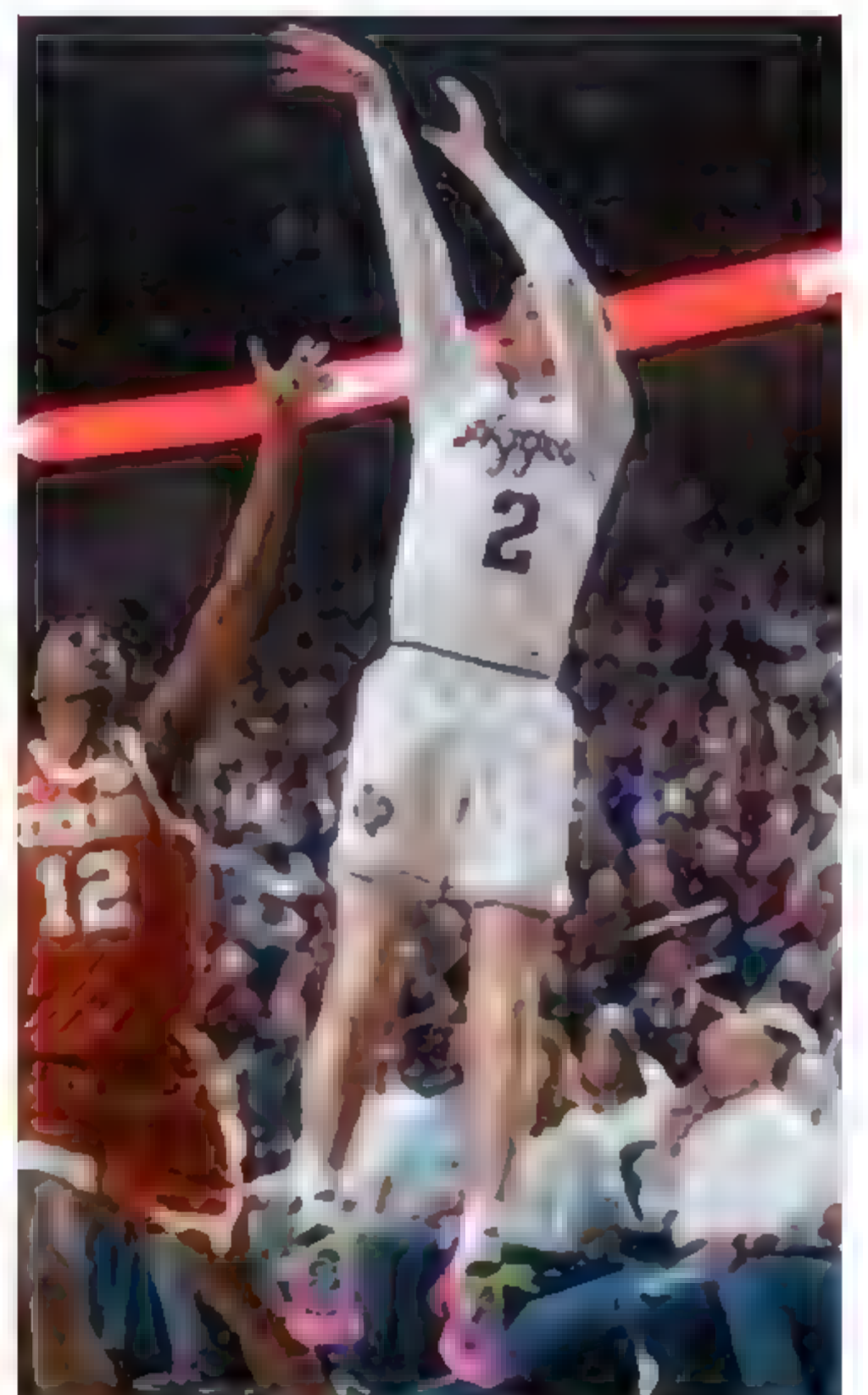




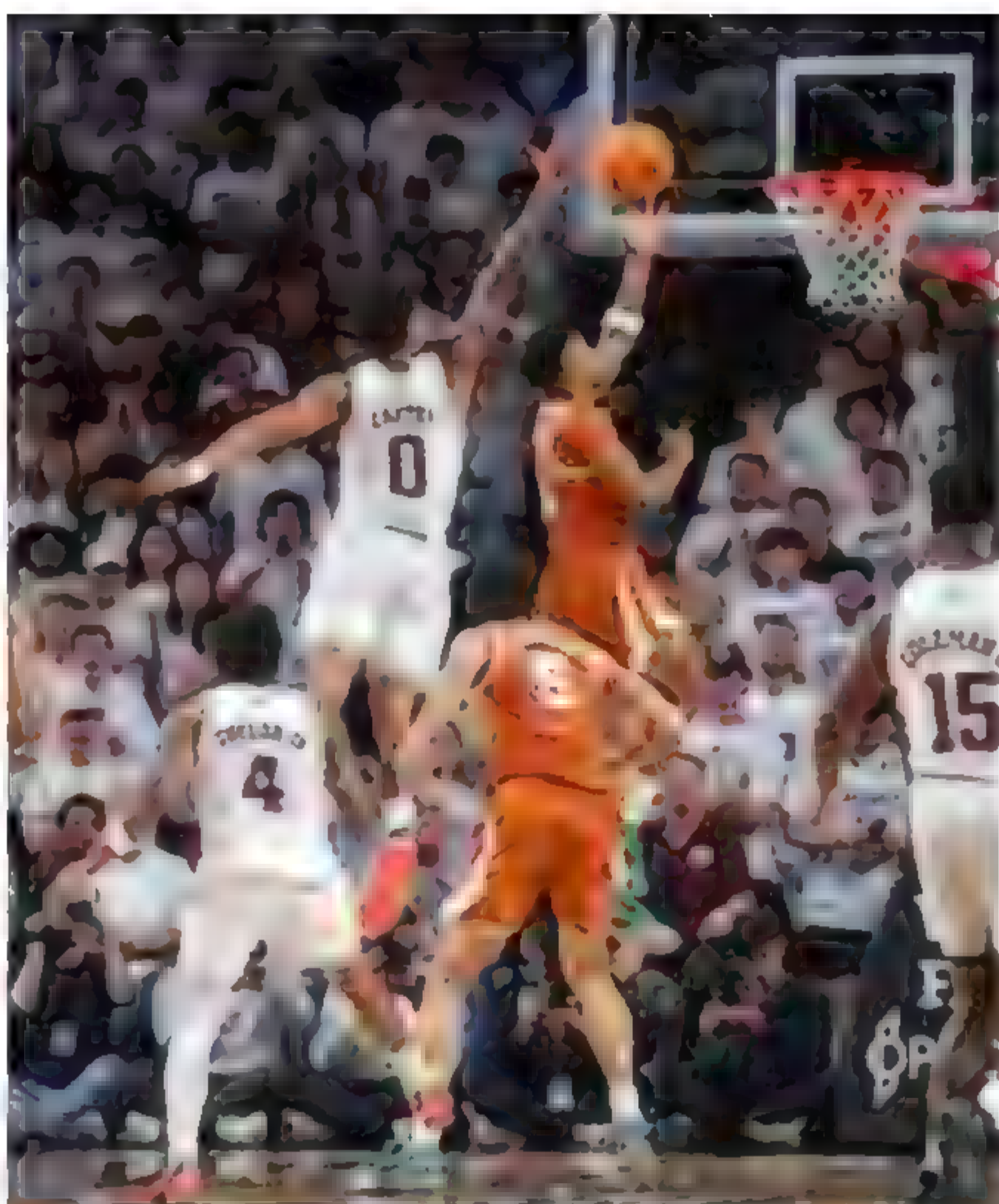
# RIVALRY RENEWED

AGGIES HAMMER HORNS

BY ROB HAVENS '88







After 13 long years, the Aggies and Horns finally faced each other on the hardwood as conference foes. Not even the SEC powers that be, who conveniently scheduled the contest while our students were on Christmas break, could prevent a sold-out Reed Arena hungry for blood. The Aggies entered the contest with a seven-game winning streak and a battle-tested non-conference schedule. The Longhorns were seeking their first-ever SEC win, but the Aggies were motivated to spoil their day.

Like a heavyweight boxing match the two teams went back and forth in the first half with seven lead changes. The Aggies trailed by eight at one point but were able to tie the game at 37 with five seconds left in the half.

In the second half, it was all Aggies, as senior transfer

Zhuric Phelps scored 15 of his 18 points, going 5-7 from the field and 5-7 from the stripe to propel the Aggies to a win. Hayden Hefner and Pharrel Payne helped the Aggies go on an 11-3 run that gave the team a double-digit lead that they would never give up.

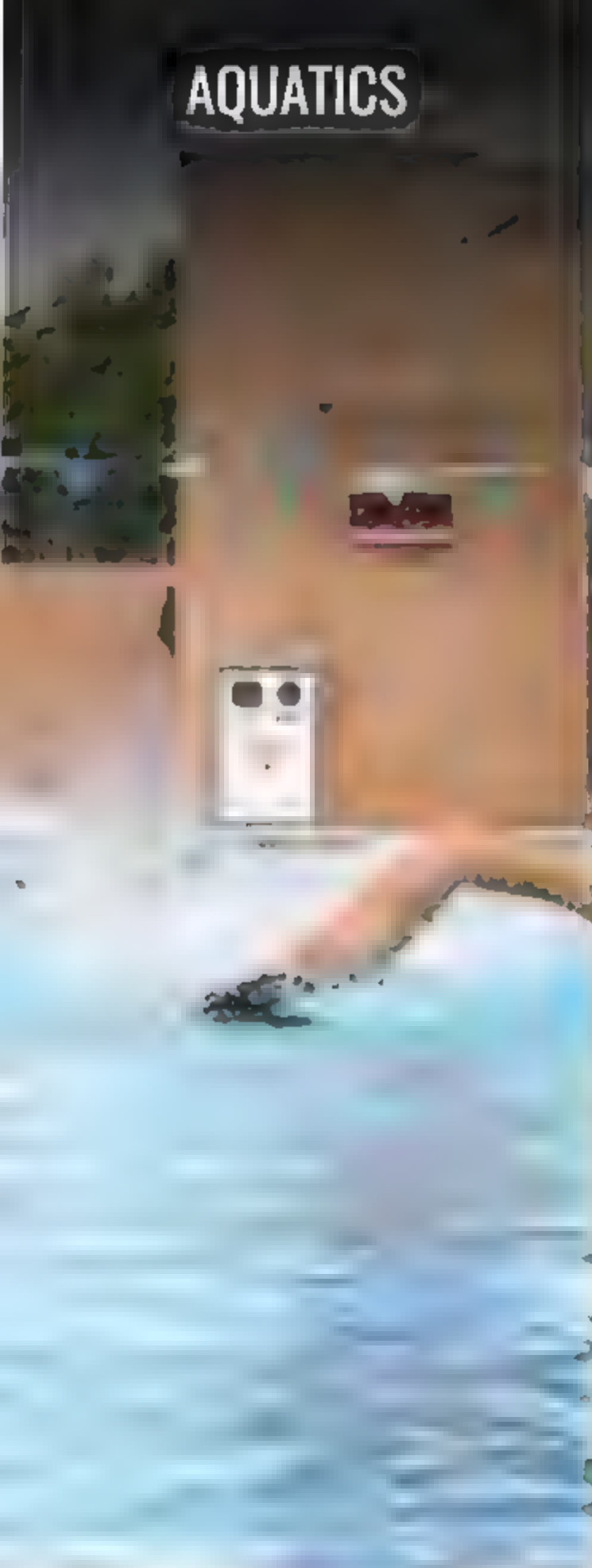
Wade Taylor IV would score 13 and Manny Obaseki 10 to give the Aggies a 20-point victory, 80-60. Texas A&M's defense limited the Horns to 34.62% shooting from the field and only 26.92% from three-point land. Solomon Washington led the team in rebounds with 10.

There really is nothing better than watching a sold-out Reed Arena Sawing 'em Off with the Horns in the house. It was a great win for the Aggies and proof that the rivalry is still very much alive. ■

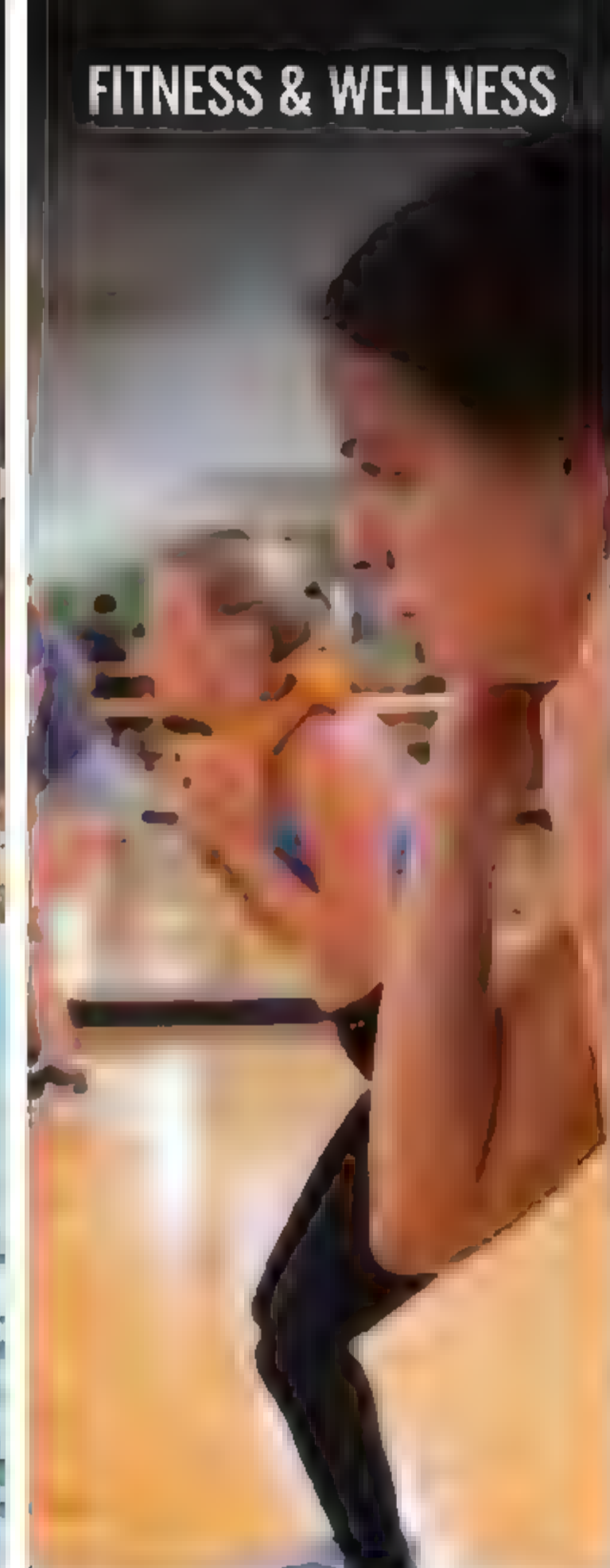




AQUATICS



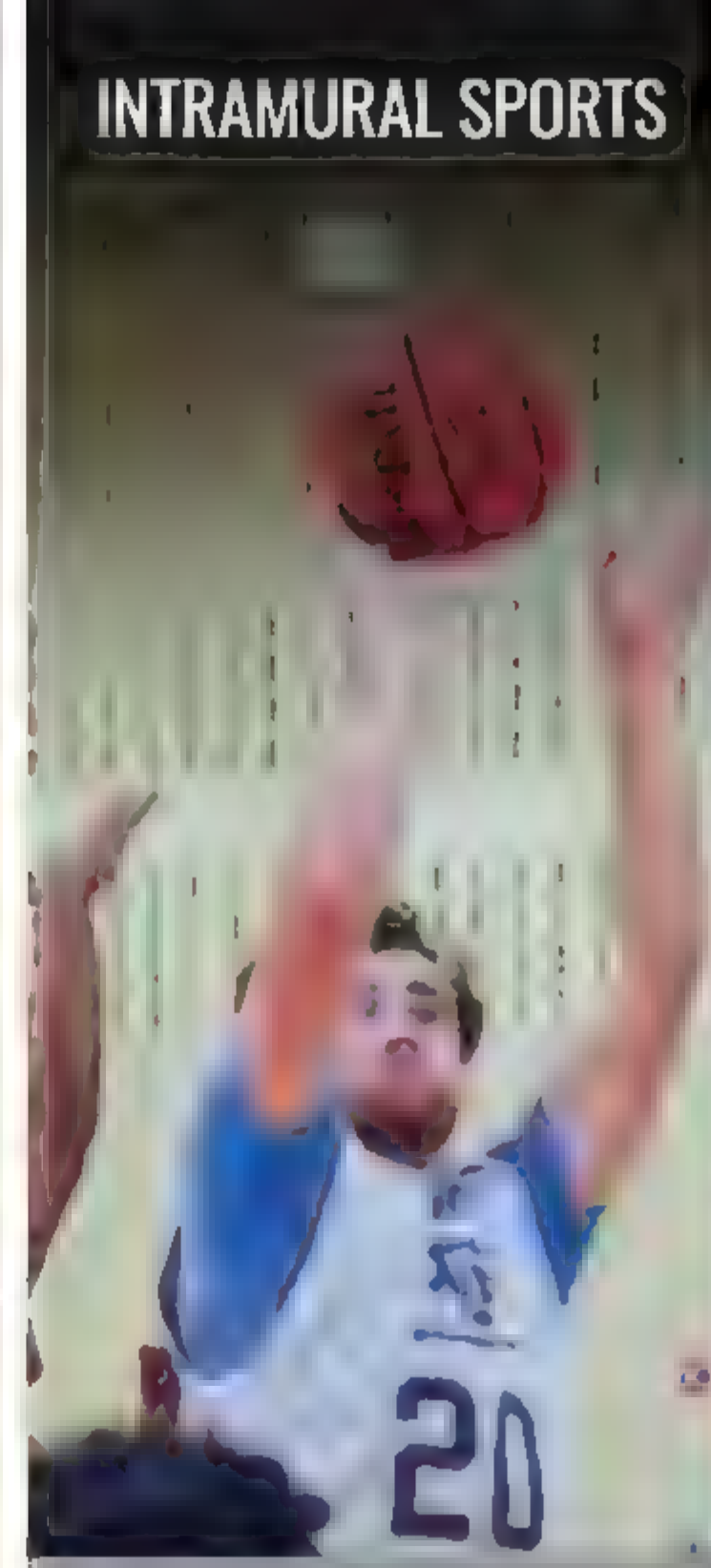
FITNESS &amp; WELLNESS



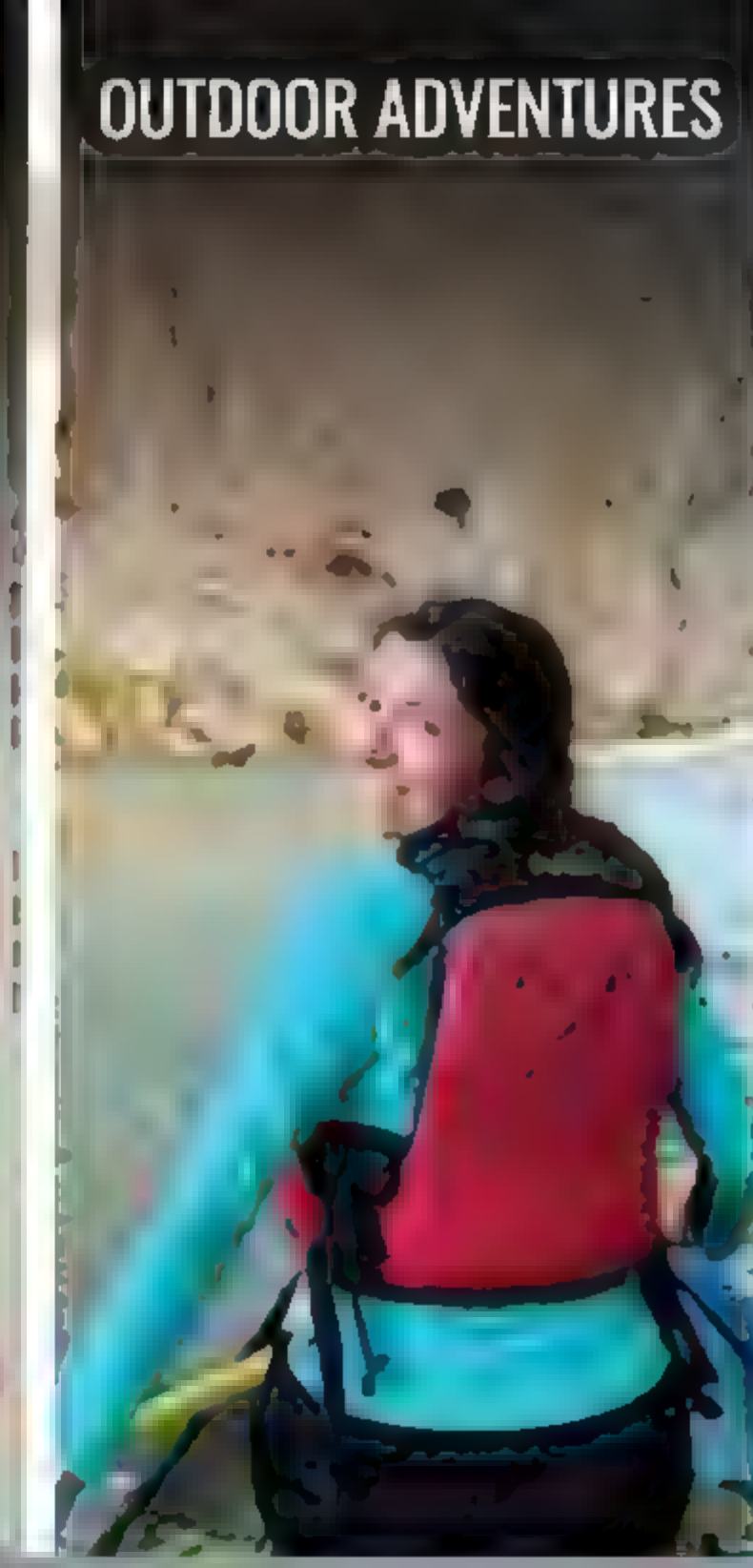
INDOOR CLIMBING FACILITY



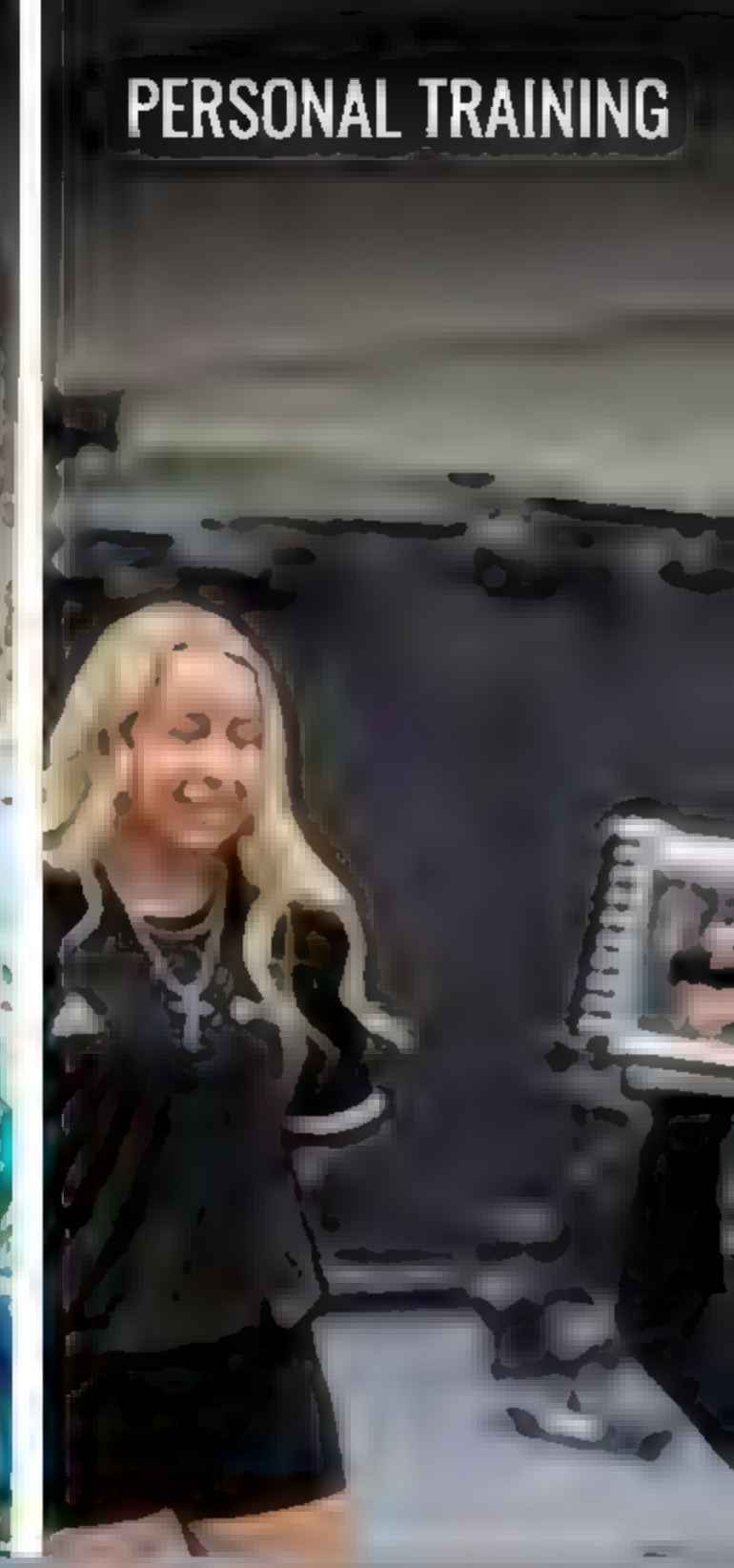
INTRAMURAL SPORTS



OUTDOOR ADVENTURES



PERSONAL TRAINING



## REC SPORTS PROGRAMS

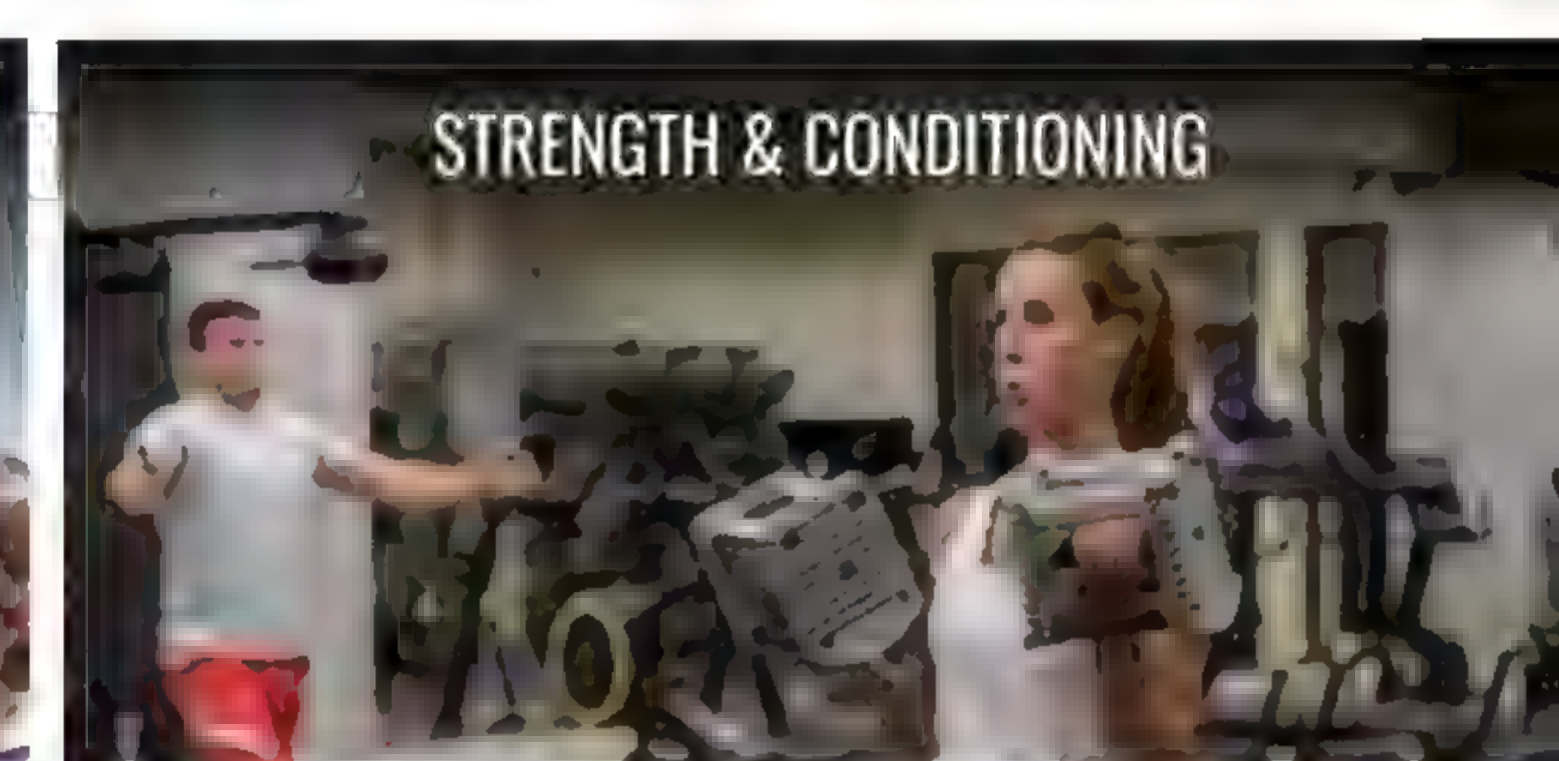
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## REC SPORTS FACILITIES

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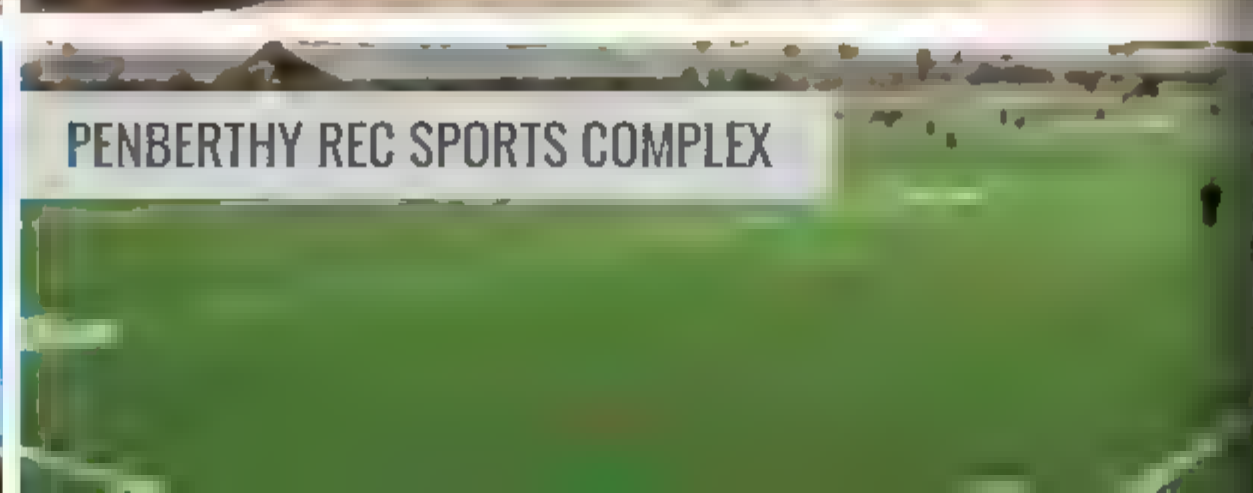
SOUTHSIDE REC CENTER



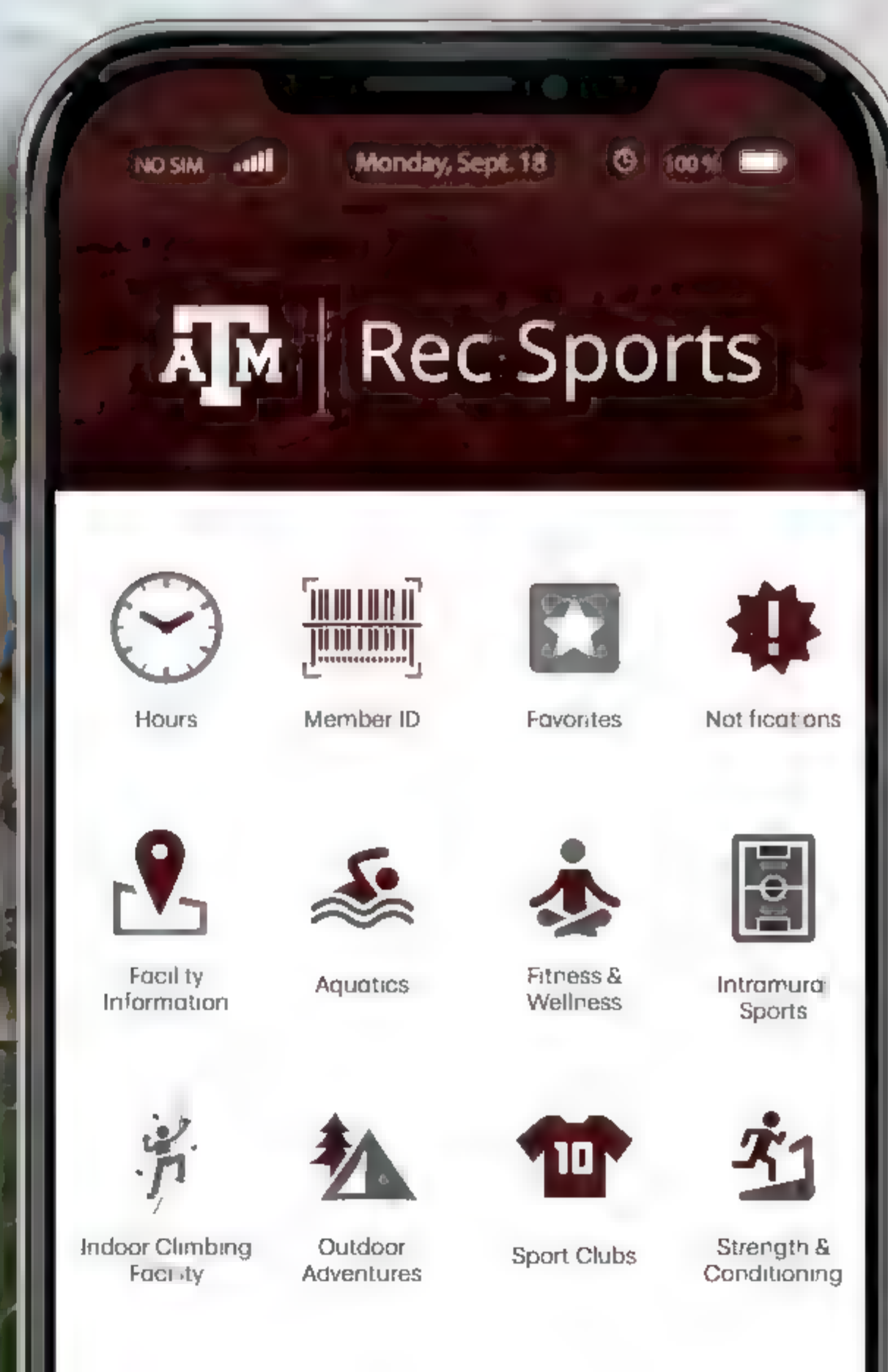
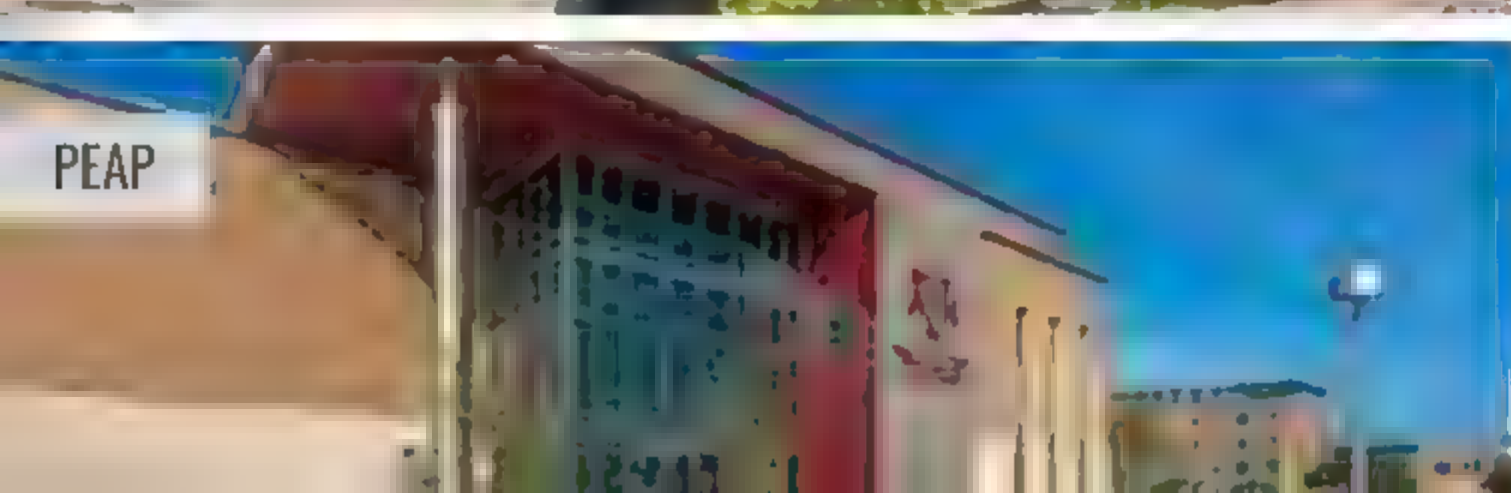
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## Rec Sports

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

### WOMEN'S CLUB BASKETBALL

BY ROB HAVENS '88

Did you know there's more than one women's basketball team on campus? While Coach Joni Taylor's team is competing for an SEC Championship, another group of Aggies is chasing a national title. Texas A&M's Women's Club Basketball (WCB) team is competing to win a championship in the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA).

WCB competes regionally against LSU, University of North Texas, TCU, and Baylor as they try to win the conference either by having the highest winning percentage in conference play or by securing an automatic bid through a Regional Tournament victory. The Aggies were conference champions in 2024 and narrowly missed reaching the semifinals at the NIRSA National Tourney in Madison, Wisconsin.

Club President Lexi Caddell describes WCB as a highly competitive team, with 10-12 members each season. The team practices twice a week, plays a non-conference schedule in the fall, and shifts to conference games in the spring as they work towards a spot in the national tournament. The current team, led by new head coach Bennet Anglin, went undefeated (8-0) in the fall. They will host a tournament March 22-23 before competing in Regionals in Corpus Christi and then onto Nationals in Madison.

Caddell said she loves the time spent traveling with her teammates, but her favorite part of the experience is competing alongside friends while representing the school which means so much to her. "We strive to represent Texas A&M's core values through all

aspects of the organization," Caddell said. "The WCB team represents each of A&M's Core Values but particularly it exemplifies excellence, loyalty, and integrity."

"The relationships built between fellow Aggie teammates feels like the unbreakable bond of a family." They even break out of their huddles by saying "On three, one, two, three-family!" As they compete for a national title, Caddell explained "They have an opportunity to display Texas A&M's core values to 97 other college club teams around the United States."



### CLIMBING TEAM

BY ROB HAVENS '88

One of my favorite things about covering Rec Sport Clubs is finding out about a club on campus that a lot of people don't know about. Did you know that Texas A&M once had "Craggies" on campus? According to Texas A&M Climbing Team president Gloria Warner, "crag" is a slang term for rock, and back in 2004 when a small group of Aggies started the club, the team was known as the "Craggies".

Texas A&M Climbing Team currently has 40 members who practice twice a week. The team hosts its major competition in the fall, it's known as BTHO Gravity. However, things pick up in the spring as they compete against the University of Texas, Arlington, Baylor, and University of Texas in hopes of competing at Nationals.

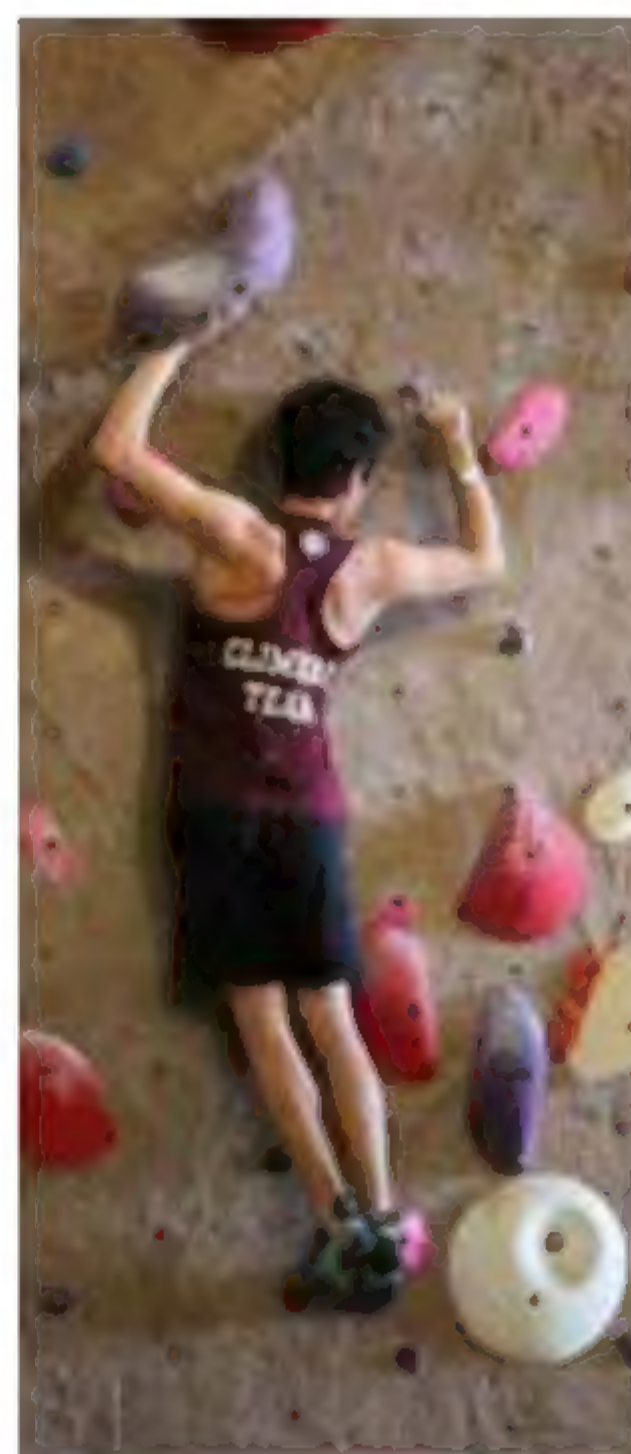
Competitions vary between Top rope and Bouldering. Depending on the kind of competition, the team generally competes in modified red point competitions, and competitors are separated based on gender. Warner explained, "Top rope, which is what I specialize in, you generally compete and your top three climbs are taken into consideration, and if there are any ties the number of attempts it took you. The top five compete in finals which

determines the 1st-5th place rankings of the competition. Bouldering is very similar but the top five climbs are generally considered."

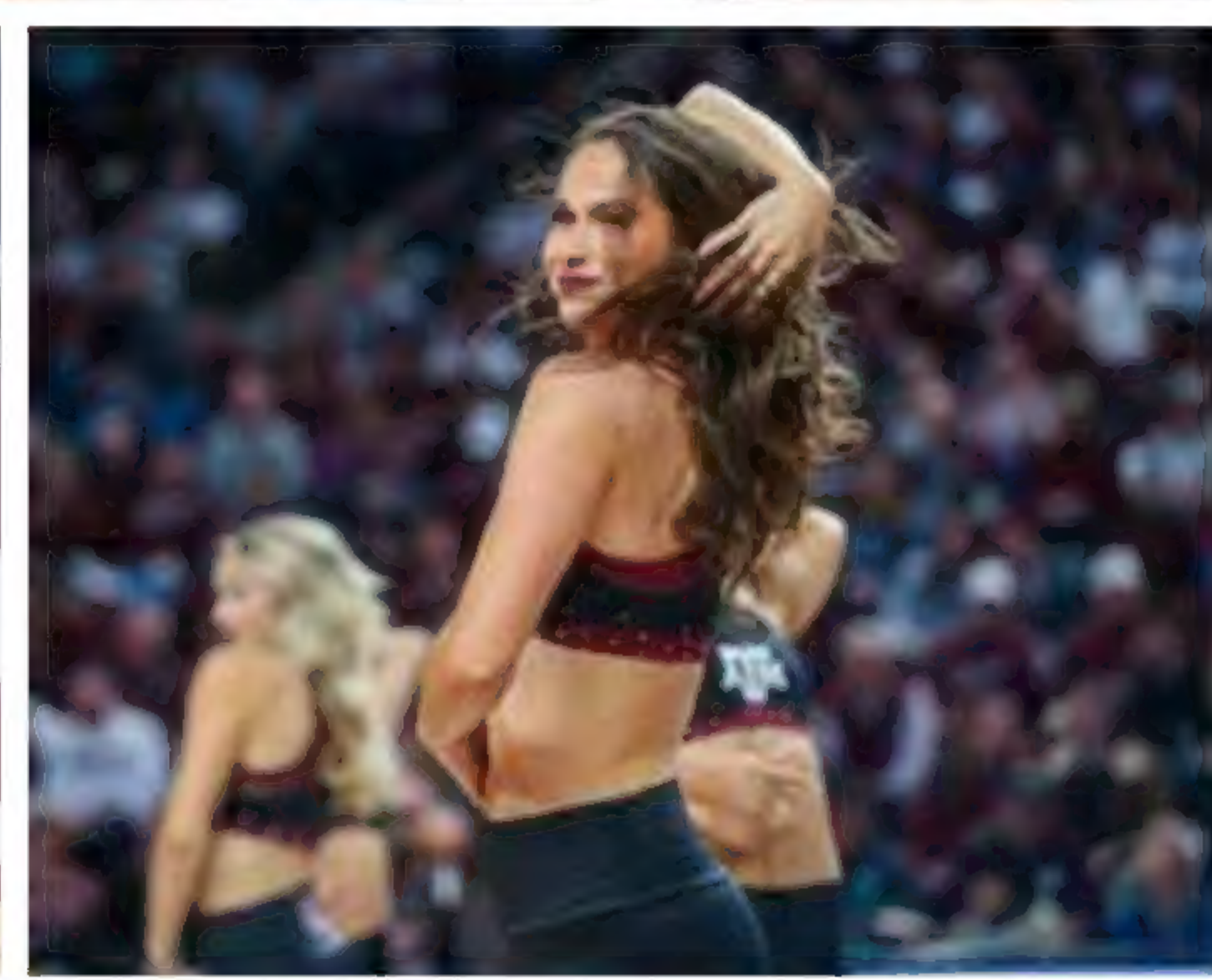
At the 2024 BTHO Gravity event, all three men who podiumed were Aggies and two of the three from the women's competition were also on the Texas A&M Climbing Team. Warner told us that team member Ryan Le is having a fantastic year and took first place at the event. She said she's

looking forward to seeing what he will do at nationals.

We asked Warner what makes a good climber and she said "Someone who can bounce back and really likes puzzles. Climbing is one part physical and 99 parts mental, it's about how you read the route, move your body, and think about the climb." Warner explained, "It's a very individual sport which makes it fun because you are always pushing yourself."



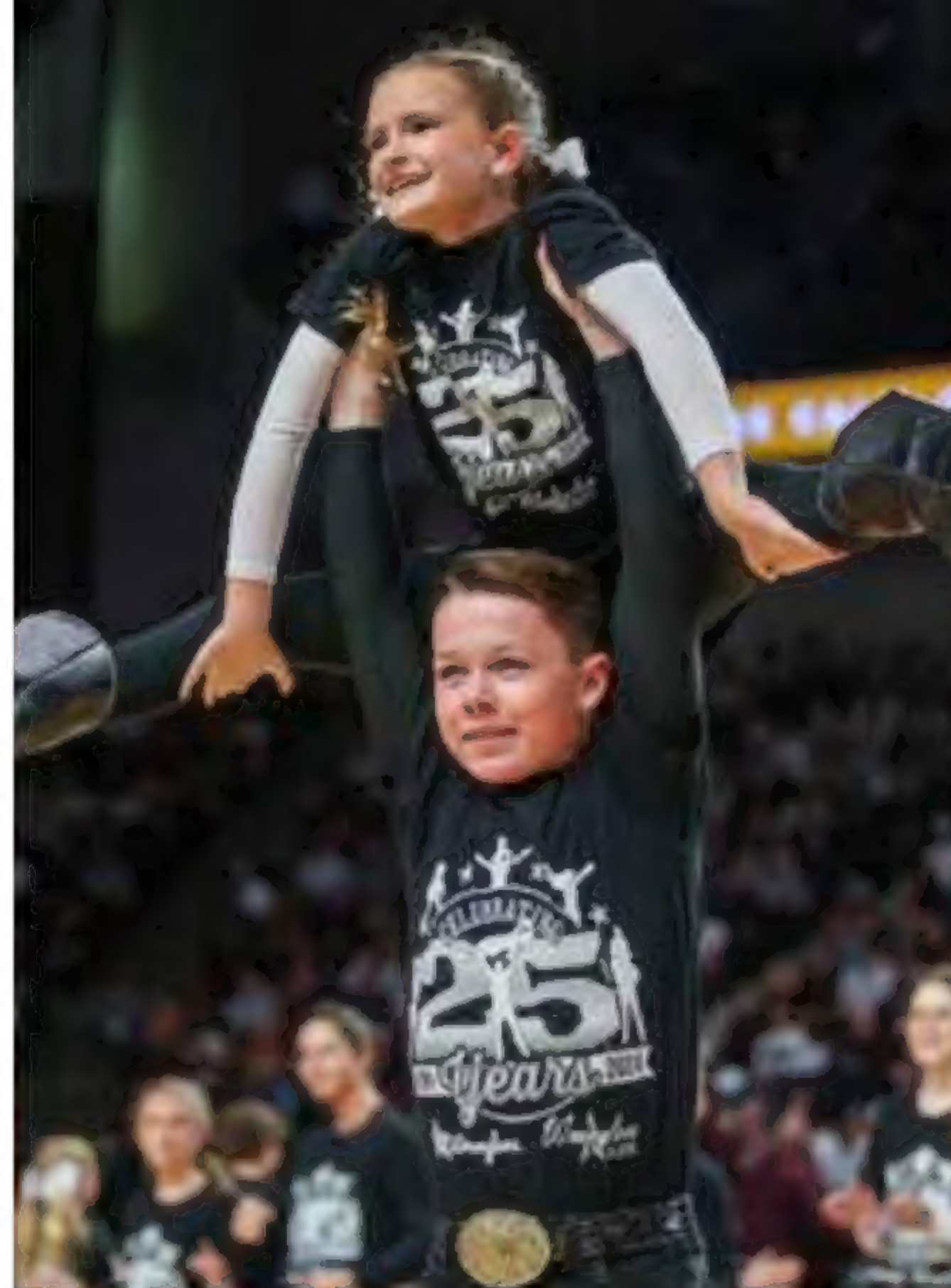








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